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A STRONG HAND HELD HER BACK—A GRAVE, SOLEMN VOICE SAID: "CHILD! WHAT WOULD YOU DO?" "I WOULD DIE!" SHE SAID, SIMPLY.

Sinned Against; or, The Winthrop Pride.

BY CLARA AUGUSTA.

CHAPTER I.

THE SUSPECTED CLERK.

The dignity of truth is lost
With much protesting.

—BEN JONSON.

ATHERTON HALL crowned a green eminence, a score of rods from the broad sweep of the Charles river; and from its windows the eye ranged

over a delightful variety of scenery, hill and valley, forest and meadow land; while a couple of miles to the east, Charlestown monument lifted up its granite finger against the sky, and in a long, continuous line the spires of Boston glittered in the sunlight. The distant horizon met the sea; the sea so darkly blue, that, but for the sails which dotted, here and there, its calm bosom, you would have thought an azure cloud had descended, to rest for a season upon the earth.

At the hall door a carriage was waiting on this fair June of which we write—a sumptuous carriage, with two gray horses, and a liveried driver. Miss Winifred Atherton, the lady of Atherton Hall, pleased to take an airing.

She came down the broad steps at last; this lagging Winifred, leaning on the arm of her father. The young lady—she had not seen more than

fifteen summers—was a beautiful picture to look upon. Father and daughter were all in all to each other—the last of a noble family. The wife and mother had slept for years in the bosom of a green grave at Auburn; the blue-eyed babe of six years was nestled to her side—the only son and brother had died at sea, and been laid to rest by rough but kindly hands in the great deep.

Robert Atherton's vast wealth would go to this daughter of his. No wonder the little lady could afford to be scornful; no wonder she walked the ground like a very queen; she had been ruler at Atherton Hall so long that a spirit of command had become with her second nature.

The pair were whirled rapidly toward Boston. Mr. Atherton to his place of business, on Broad street, Miss Winifred to spend the day with Mrs. Marchmont, on Beacon street.

The carriage was nearly opposite the police-office, when it suddenly came to a halt, its further progress impeded by a crowd about the door of the tribunal.

Winifred contented herself with tapping the velvet carpet for awhile with her dainty foot, then she grew impatient, and spoke:

"What is the cause of this delay?"

"Some trial of interest going on here, I should conclude, from the number of curious ones assembled," returned Mr. Atherton.

"Well, then, if we are to remain here, I see not why we should miss of gratifying our curiosity by witnessing the remarkable performance. I am going in to see for myself. It will be something entirely novel for me."

"My daughter! Winifred Atherton! you go into a police-court! What can you be thinking of?"

"You are brow-stricken, papa, but you will go in with me, I know."

Her hand pressed his arm; those eyes, so like her dead mother's, looked into his. He never could resist Winifred when in that mood.

"It is very foolish in you, my dear, to wish to mix with yonder vulgar crowd."

He alighted from the carriage, and handed Winifred out. The interest of the court-room was turned from the prisoner to center around the millionaire and his daughter. The scene within the office was by no means an uncommon one in a large city. A young man of about sixteen was arraigned to be tried for forgery. The circumstances, as evolved by the evidence, were briefly these:

Gerard Middleton had been under-clerk in the wholesale dry-goods establishment of Chambers & Marshall. He had enjoyed the confidence of his employers for two years; and his prompt attention to business had won the esteem of all connected with the store, except, perhaps, that of Charles Cooper, the accountant, between whom and young Middleton there had ever existed one of those mutual antipathies for which we often find it so difficult to assign a reason.

A fortnight previously, the name of the firm had been forged to a paper of importance—a draft upon the Blackstone Bank for nine hundred dollars. The check was presented by Gerard, thrown out as ungentle by the paying teller, and the clerk was detained on a charge of forgery.

The culprit stood before his judges, pale but composed; handsome he certainly was; and his bearing was quite as haughty as though he counted his money by the thousand dollars, instead of lacking a solitary copper. His defense was, simply, *innocence*. He had no knowledge of the check until it came, duly signed, into his hands; he was perfectly and entirely innocent. When did ever a statement of this kind, coming from one accused, have any weight? His employers looked upon it as a hardened evasion of the truth, and Middleton was about to be carried to prison in default of bail for fifteen hundred dollars.

Winifred's quick apprehension caught the facts of the case instantly; her heart responded sympathizingly to the look of desperate despair on the youth's face. She pressed her father's arm to secure his attention.

"Will you bail this Gerard Middleton, papa?"

"No, indeed! The saints forbid!" cried Mr. Atherton, in righteous indignation.

"Then I must do it instead!" said Winifred, with determination, and moving to the side of the magistrate, she spoke a few words in his ear. The good man started, frowned, and then smiled.

"My dear young lady, it is without precedent—this proposal of yours. It is not common for young girls to offer bail for reckless characters like this Middleton."

"Granted. Nor yet were deluges common,

but one occurred, nevertheless, in the time of Noah."

"If Miss Atherton is serious, and her father consents, no more can be said. Mr. Atherton, sir, we await your decision."

"Winifred may have her way. She is all I have to indulge, and she has taken a fancy to see the lad released. I will give bonds for him myself," returned Mr. Atherton, with much good-humor; and directly the necessary papers being drawn up and signed, Gerard Middleton was pronounced at liberty.

He advanced to the side of Miss Atherton, and held out his hand. She put her jeweled fingers into his clasp. No word was uttered, but the dark brilliant eyes of the youth spoke most eloquently his gratitude. For a moment he looked into her face—then with a slight bend of his fine figure, to the people in the court-room, he passed out.

"Well, daughter," said Mr. Atherton, when they were once more seated in the carriage, "you have liberated the young scamp; what do you propose to do with him?"

"Do with him? Why, you will take him into the store, of course."

"There is not a single vacant place in the whole concern, and if there were a hundred, I would not admit one like him."

"If there is no vacancy, you must create a new place to be filled. A place for this Gerard Middleton's special benefit."

"Not to save his head!"

"Very well. Then I will find a situation for him."

"Eh! what?"

"Fall in love with his handsome face, and invite him to elope with me, if nothing more favorable offers. Our names would sound finely together in the *Morning Herald*."

"Winifred Atherton, you will be in a lunatic asylum yet! Elope with him, indeed! Elope with a rascally clerk!"

"I shall be obliged to do so, father, unless you can put him in some place where he can earn his living; for, you see, a clerk has to eat, and drink, and wear coats like other men."

Mr. Atherton winced; he was used to this matter-of-fact dealing from his girl, and yet he did not like it.

"Perhaps I can get him into Porter's grocery as errand boy. Too good for him, I dare say."

"And I will not permit him to go there to be ordered about by cross husbands and sour old maids, buying half a pound of sugar and two ounces of tea. Recollect, Mr. Gerard's my property now."

"Well, well, I will see about it. Perhaps Dalton can let him into his department to assist in the job work."

"Nothing of the kind, dear papa. I veto that plan entirely. This boy has a proud spirit, or I have failed to read his face aright. He shall not be humbled in that way. It would make him reckless: perhaps, lead him to crime. Show him that you have confidence in his integrity, and he will die rather than forfeit your good opinion. He must be nothing less than a clerk!"

"Winifred, what a famous little autocrat you would make for the Russians. Every man's head in the empire would be struck off in a week, who refused to swear fullest allegiance to your madcap plots."

"Dear sir, you flatter me. Shall my despotic ladyship be indulged, and thus Gerard become the respected incumbent of a respectable and lucrative situation in the hardware establishment of Robert Atherton & Co.?"

"Yes, yes; I will hunt him up if only to rid myself of your teasing. He will be a drawback upon me, no doubt; forge my name, or steal my bank-notes, but he shall have some situation with me, if it be only to stand by my elbow and wipe my pens."

"Very good. You are philanthropic, father mine, for which I kiss your cheek; and here we are!"

The coach drew up before a splendid stone mansion. In a few moments Winifred and pretty little Mrs. Marchmont were exchanging their delighted greeting in the shaded drawing-room; while Mr. Atherton, both vexed and amused with this new *penchant* of his daughter's, was borne rapidly down to his warehouses on Broad street.

CHAPTER II.

LIGHT AND SHADE.

MR. ATHERTON was as good as his word. Gerard Middleton was sought, found, and installed as assistant-correspondent in the counting-room of the wealthy merchant.

Young Middleton's history, previous to this

time, was that of many another of his class. His father had been a poor but talented artist, who, dying young, left his widow and their child, Gerard, in a state of painful indigence. Mrs. Middleton came from a wealthy, as well as haughty family, and, having been disowned and cast off by these relatives, for wedding the man of her choice, she had too much of her kindred's stern pride, now, in her destitution to call upon them for assistance.

For three years she worked uninterruptedly for the tailors' shops in Boston, receiving in payment barely sufficient to keep soul and body together. The incessant toil and anxiety so wrought upon her slender frame that she was brought to a bed of sickness, from which she never arose. The kind physician—poor like herself—who, out of the Christian benevolence of his heart, visited her, said that only healthful food and country air could restore her. As well might we have prescribed the melted pearls of Cleopatra, or the powder of the Koh-i-noor diamond. For days the meager room where she dwelt was without fire—and night after night the darling boy went to his rude bed fasting, because there was no bread!

Mrs. Middleton's powers of life wasted away, and with hands meekly folded upon her breast, she committed herself to the care of the God whom she was not afraid to trust. He, seeing how weary of earth was her spirit, severed the silver thread, and rent in twain the golden bowl. Gerard Middleton was crushed by the words of the physician, who had remained until the last:—"You are motherless."

The boy was ten years old; bright, active, and intelligent—and yet he was carried to the workhouse. There were privileges of learning there—and these he improved to the utmost. When thirteen, he was taken into the office of a legal gentleman as copyist. Here he remained a year or more, when his superior penmanship attracted the attention of Mr. Chambers, senior member of a dry goods firm, and after a little settlement of preliminaries, Gerard was domiciled with his new employers.

His only friend, during all this time, was Ruth Mowbray—a pauper, as he, himself, had been. Both of Ruth's parents had died in coming to this country from England; and their daughter had been consigned, by the captain of the vessel, to the home of the poor, immediately on their arrival in port.

Ruth was two years Gerard's junior; a beautiful, fair-haired, blue-eyed girl; untainted by the associations which had of late surrounded her, and pure in heart as the white water-lily.

The boy and the girl had continued like brother and sister; and as soon as Gerard was able to earn something, he insisted on sharing his pittance with her. Through his influence with Mr. Chambers, Ruth was received into the millinery store of Madame De Lanier, on Washington street, as an apprentice; where her engaging manners, and lovely face, attracted many a customer to her employer's counter.

Gerard Middleton had been but a few days in his new situation, when Mr. Atherton invited him to ride out to the Hall, and pass the night. It was not exactly a cordial invitation, for the rich merchant had many doubts regarding his clerk.

But it was Winifred's expressed pleasure to see the suspected forger, and her father could deny her nothing which had the shadow of reason about it.

Middleton was received, by the young mistress of the Hall, with much kindness; and after tea, she set herself to work at sounding the attainments and qualifications of her *protege*. Winifred was a close questioner, and Middleton was obliged to confess that he knew no language save his own, and that rather imperfectly; and he could not sing, play, or cut a figure in the dance.

"Very well," said Winifred, composedly—"I will teach you Latin and French. Sometime when I go into business for myself, I am going to make you my foreign agent, and then the tongues of other nations will be of benefit to you."

"The Latin, in particular," observed Mr. Atherton.

"To be sure, if he should be engaged in purchasing medicines, as I suppose he will; for you know, papa, I have serious thoughts of becoming a female physician."

"A female fiddlestick!" retorted Mr. Atherton, indignantly.

Winifred was used to this mood of her father's, so it did not trouble her in this instance, and she made an engagement to commence her lessons on the following evening. Mr. Atherton

would bring the pupil up in his carriage, at night, and take him back in the morning, she said; and Mr. Atherton was obliged to nod assentingly.

And thus it happened that Gerard Middleton came daily within the influence of this proud, but warm-hearted girl. And during those quiet seasons at her side, he learned to know the meaning of every curl of her red lip, every toss of her queenly head; he learned to fear offending her, to love to toil for her approbation; to look upon her as upon the evening star, so gorgeously beautiful, yet so very far above his reach.

During six months this quiet continued, and then the time appointed for his appearance at court drew nigh. Gerard felt restless and uneasy; he feared condemnation, more because it would shut him away from his star, than because of his own disgrace and humiliation.

It was the evening previous to the day on which his guilt or innocence was to be established. Gerard sat by the side of Winifred, repeating his task, when a note was brought in and placed before him. He broke it open, ran his eye greedily over the contents, while a flush of joy mounted to his pale cheek. He gave it to Winifred—she read it aloud:

"MR. GERARD MIDDLETON:—I am on the eve of departure for Europe. I am purposing to confess to Messrs. Chambers & Marshall the guilt which I now confess to you. I forged that check on the Blackstone Bank, and caused you to be sent to draw it, because I hated you. I asked you once to introduce me to the pretty seamstress, Ruth Mowbray, and you refused, calling me some bad names that it is useless to repeat. I wanted to be revenged on you, but, as I am rather a good fellow, I am willing to be generous, especially as I can afford it, having recently fallen heir to a fortune of a hundred thousand pounds, waiting for me in merry old England. I run no risk in exonerating you; as, with my poverty, I renounce forever the plebeian name of

"CHARLES COOPER."

There was a light of triumph in Winifred's eyes as she finished reading.

"Well, father, what do you think now of my discernment?"

"It seems you were right, Winnie; and I beg Middleton's pardon for distrusting him; but let us have no scenes. Go on with your conjugations."

All through the winter and early spring Winifred devoted herself to her self-imposed task of teaching her father's clerk, and the most sanguine teacher must have been astonished at the progress made by the scholar. Gerard's intellect was quick and vigorous; and he caught at all sources of knowledge with avidity—just such an avidity as was pleasing to the exacting nature of Miss Atherton.

Late in May came Winifred's sixteenth birthday, and the quiet of the hall was entirely broken up. On the evening which made her sixteen, the heiress was to be presented to society—brought out in a grand reception-ball. Preparations for this great event went rapidly forward, and Middleton's visits were interrupted. Presents from attached friends poured in upon the young beauty, in lavish profusion; diamonds and pearls sparkled, and mingled together upon her dressing-table; and bouquets of costly blossoms perfumed the spacious alcoves of the wide drawing-room.

Winifred had pressed Gerard to be present at the reception—he had declined with a painful blush, which did not escape the eye of the petted heiress. An engagement, he said, would prevent him from enjoying the pleasure Miss Atherton so kindly offered him. Winifred's face flushed hotly; but she only said—very well, Mr. Middleton was at liberty to do as he chose.

Gerard did not tell her that this engagement—this walk to Chelsea with Ruth Mowbray—could be indefinitely postponed as well; he did not tell her that his only reason for declining to be present at the *fete*, was because he had not, in the wide world, money enough to purchase a suit of clothes fitting to wear to such an aristocratic assembly.

Just before the hour set apart for the arrival of the guests, while Winifred was yet at her toilet, a simple cluster of wild arbutus flowers, fresh and sweet in their pink fragrance, came to her, with the name of Gerard Middleton written on a slip of paper which entwined the slender stems.

Those pure flowers found a resting-place in the silver glossiness of her hair that night, but Gerard was not there to witness the effect, and none knew the secret, but envied the giver.

Winifred Atherton was flattered to her heart's fullest content. She could not have wished for

a denser cloud of incense than that which hung around her wherever she moved. Proud heads bent low before her—strong hearts beat quicker at her smile, and in all that crowd of youth and loveliness there were none to compare with Winifred. She sung—her voice was rich and sweet and powerful; and she played with the touch of a Thalberg. She conversed—her lively wit, her tact, and versatility astonished and charmed her listeners.

Milford Winthrop, the wealthy, influential, and talented barrister, for once, acknowledged the power of beauty. He was twice Winifred's age; a tall, grave, stately man, with an unlimited good opinion of himself. Report vaguely whispered that there were circumstances connected with this man's first youth that, if known, would confer no luster on his character; but he was rich and powerful—and no one cared to revive old, half-forgotten memories.

Through the season of gayety which succeeded her birthday-party, she was the queen of every assembly, the grand center about which a train of satellites revolved. But in spite of all this homage, she grew colder and colder until her half-hopeless adorers called her The Heart of Ice; and yet they persisted in fluttering around her, hoping, perhaps, to melt the frosty mail.

Gerard Middleton never came to the house now; Winifred saw him only at rare intervals, when she called with some gay party, at her father's store, to assist in selecting bronzes and costly candelabras for some newly-wedded friend. At such times he never greeted her, unless she first addressed him. He never lifted his face to hers, though the crimson deepened on his cheek, and the pen he held moved unsteadily over the paper. There was little of the cur about this proud clerk; he would not fawn about the hand that might, the next moment, thrust him away.

Toward the close of October, a party was made up for an excursion to Mt. Holyoke, and a week's sojourn in its romantic vicinity. Mr. Winthrop was to accompany Miss Atherton; Mr. and Mrs. Marchmont and other friends were to be of the party.

It was a cloudless morning when they set forth—all anticipating a merry time, and all in good spirits. Winifred saw, with some surprise, that Gerard Middleton occupied a seat near her, and she spoke of it to Mr. Winthrop, who said that Mr. Atherton had sent the clerk out to Springfield on business connected with his trade.

The train proceeded steadily and safely; every wheel performed its duty. They reached a long bridge built over an arm of the Chicopee river. There was a momentary trembling of the timbers, as the engine plunged over them—then Winifred heard a dull, dead crash—she was sensible of nothing more, until Mr. Middleton, snatching her up in his arms, dashed with her out upon the platform. Not a moment's pause did he make to reply to her indignant speech of resistance, but with one athletic bound, he cleared the tottering platform, and leaped with his burden into the water!

Bearing her up with one arm, he struck out for the shore with the other, and in a few moments Winifred, cold and dripping, stood upon the firm sand. Her cheeks burned crimson, and her eyes flashed haughtily as she confronted the young man.

"Sir, what means this insult?"

He lifted his hand and pointed in the direction of the train they had just quit.

"Look and see!" he said, calmly.

She did look, and all the pride and scorn went out of her face. The cheeks grew white—the eyes lost their angry brilliancy. She put her hand in his for support and sympathy. His fingers closed over hers, but neither spoke while they gazed together upon the sad scene.

The bridge, its massive timbers broken in the center, lay tossing about in the swift current of the river; the mighty engine had half buried its shattered body in the hard gravel on the opposite side; and the cars, in one crushed, confused mass, were piled up against the abutment of the bridge.

The unfortunate passengers, such of them as were left alive, were making their egress from broken windows and rent doors—some with faces pale and bloody, others uninjured.

Of the latter class was Mr. Winthrop; who, without delay, hastened to the side of Miss Atherton to offer his congratulations on her escape. He thanked Mr. Middleton coldly for the service he had done the lady, and drawing her hand within his arm, led her away to the nearest dwelling-house.

Middleton bowed haughtily to this coolly expressive gratitude, and turned his back upon the speaker. What did he care for the scorn of the rich man, so long as the soft hand of Winifred had pressed his?—and her eyes looked, wet with tears, into his face! He knew she was not all ice.

When Mr. Atherton heard of the conduct of his clerk, he was filled with admiration and gratitude, and thanked the young man in a torrent of enthusiasm wrung from the depths of his parental love.

CHAPTER III.

THE MIDNIGHT BRIDAL.

Mine after life! What is mine after life? My day is closed. The gloom of night comes on—A hopeless darkness settles o'er my fate.

JOANNA BAILLIE.

OF course, the excursion to Holyoke was broken up; three of the pleasure-seekers were among the dead; and several were severely wounded.

For a time, the shadow of this melancholy accident dampened the spirit of gayety in the circles where the dead unfortunates had moved; but ere long the occurrence was forgotten.

Balls, soirees and masquerades followed each other in rapid succession. At each bright assembly Winifred Atherton shone pre-eminent. Mr. Winthrop was still her constant cavalier. She would look splendidly at the head of *his* table, she would do the honors of *his* house right royally; she had a fine figure for displaying the costly fabrics in which he should be proud to see *his* wife clothed; in his heart he fated her to become Mrs. Winthrop, the mistress of Maplewood.

Valentine's Eve arrived, cold and frosty—and on this evening Mrs. Marchmont was to give a grand ball. Of course Miss Atherton was expected to be present, *the belle, par excellence*.

Winifred stood before the tall mirror, in her dressing-room, that wintry afternoon, and watched the effect of the crimson velvet robe, in which the nimble fingers of her maid were arraying her. There were gleaming rubies on her arms and around her throat; precious gems which had just been brought in—bearing on their richly chased clasps the simple inscription—

"TO WINIFRED, FROM HER FATHER."

The eyes of the brilliant beauty fell on the rosy glitter of the jewels: she bowed down her head, and kissed the bracelet which clasped her snowy wrist—murmuring softly:

"Dear papa! how kind and tender he is! How could I live without his love?"

The maid finished the exquisite *coiffure*; the last curl was arranged, the last fold of lace in its place; and Winifred, with a book in her hand, sat down to await the coming of her father. Time passed swiftly; the ebony clock on the chimney struck out another hour, and still Mr. Atherton lingered.

The lady grew impatient. Mrs. Marchmont would be offended if she were late at the ball. She rose at last, and turned to go down-stairs.

"Tell my father, when he comes, that I waited a full hour for him to see my dress, and—Good heavens! what means this confusion below?"

She flew down the stairs at a bound. The hall was thronged with men, wearing pale and solemn countenances. She would have rushed through the crowd to the parlor, whither some shrouded object was being borne, but a strong arm held her back, and drew her into a side-room. The door was closed, and the man placed his back against it, thus preventing her attempted escape.

She lifted her face imploringly to his.

"What is it, Gerard Middleton? Has any thing happened to my father?"

Gerard was very pale, but his voice was calm and even. He took in his own hand she had unconsciously laid on his arm.

"Be composed, Miss Atherton. You have fortitude—bring it to your aid."

"Fortitude! oh, yes; I can bear any thing! Only tell me the worst! Suspense will kill me! Is my father dead?"

"No; thank God, he is not dead!"

"But he is dying! I read it in your face! Out of my way, this moment, sir! I will go to him! My place is at his side!"

"The surgeon is examining his injuries. You must wait."

"Wait! I cannot wait! Wait! and my father—the only one I have a right to love—dying! Again I ask you, tell me the worst."

"Sit down then; your fearful looks make me

tremble for your reason. Your father was passing along Water street an hour ago—they are taking down some old buildings there—and a falling timber struck him on the forehead. He was raised up senseless, and by a physician's orders we have brought him home."

"Do they say he will die senseless? Will he never be able to speak again?"

"Miss Atherton, your very calmness terrifies me. Have you no tears to shed? no groans to utter?"

"Tears! will they bring my father back to health? Tears are a mockery. Tell me if he will speak to me again—before the eternal silence comes?"

"In all probability, yes. When his shocked system shall recover from this stupor."

"You would tell me that pain will restore him?"

"Perhaps so."

"Well, then, so be it. Mr. Middleton, look at me. Am I not composed and serene? Do you see any manifestation of emotion and spasm of suffering?"

"I see a stone statue!"

"Very good. Statues do not feel. Therefore take me to my father."

He led the way, she followed; and the two passed on to the couch of the wounded man. Mr. Atherton lay upon a bed which had been hastily arranged in the center of the room; his eyes were closed, and his brow bound with a white cloth.

Winifred approached and touched his cheek with her hand. The motion revived him; he opened his eyes and spoke—

"Winifred, my daughter, is it you?"

"It is I, father."

"You are calm; thank heaven for that, you are calm, and yet you are very pale, Winifred?"

"Yes, I am composed—perhaps a little pale, but that is nothing. My heart beats steadily—my limbs do not tremble."

"No. And for this I rejoice. I had feared otherwise. My child, your father is dying; you will soon be a desolate orphan—alone, and without kindred."

A sharp spasm shook her frame—the marble stillness of her face was troubled, but she recovered herself almost immediately.

"I am going to leave you, Winifred; and before I go, you must be provided with a legal protector. You are too young and beautiful to be left without a guardian."

"Well, father."

"My daughter, I am about to require of you an act of instant obedience to a wish I have never before expressed in your hearing. Within this room, before the lapse of another hour, you must become the wife of Milford Winthrop!"

Winifred staggered back like one stricken by a rifle-ball; her face would be no whiter when the grave-sods pressed down upon it.

"God forbid!" she ejaculated, in horrified accents.

"It is as I had expected. You are shocked at such unseemly haste. You think, perhaps, that Mr. Winthrop will share in that feeling. Let me assure you that you are mistaken. Months ago, he asked of me my daughter's hand, and I told him he must wait until you had time to love him. In this man I have full confidence; I would trust him with my life—I am not afraid to confide to him my dearest treasure—my Winifred. Knowing that you are his wife, I can die content; the grave will have no thorns for me. This is no senseless chimera of a fevered brain; it is the firmly grounded resolve of one, who, as a dying man, discerns all things more clearly the nearer he approaches that country where we shall see no more through a glass darkly."

The sufferer paused to regain strength: Winifred drew herself up resolutely.

"Ask any thing but that, my father! Require my life, and it shall be given up to you! But this thing I can not do."

"You must do it, Winifred Atherton! there is no room for a single doubt on that point. I, your father, command it. By your fears of my dying curse, dare to disobey!"

"I must dare it, father! I would defy the powers of the infernal regions, rather than perjure myself at the altar!"

Mr. Atherton fell back; a terrible change passed over his face. A deadly pallor settled on his lips—his eyes grew fixed and glassy. Winifred sprang forward and raised his head to her bosom.

"Speak to me once more, father! Bless me—your little Winifred—before you go!"

He turned his face away from her, and moaned out, feebly:

"Little did I think my own girl would inflict this grief on her old father! Little did I think that my death-hour would be imbibed by that child's disobedience! The few brief moments I have to live must be cut short; my death hastened by the willfulness of my only daughter!"

His words cut her to the heart. She fell on her knees by the bedside, and cried, brokenly:

"Do with me as you will! I cannot listen to such reproaches as these, and live!"

Mr. Atherton's face brightened; with one feeble arm he drew her head down on his bosom, and kissed her icy lips.

"God in heaven bless my daughter! She will make her father's death-bed a couch of ease!"

Mr. Winthrop came forward from the window where he had been standing, and took the cold, passive hand of the girl in his. At a sign from Mr. Atherton, a gray-haired, mild-faced old man advanced, and stood up before the waiting trio.

Gerard Middleton, pale, and unaccountably agitated, rose to leave the apartment.

A look from Winifred stopped him. She went over to his side, and said:

"Stay with me, Gerard. Stay and see me changed to stone. So merry and glad a wedding should not lack a groomsman."

And Gerard closed the door he had opened, and came back to the bedside.

It was a sad and solemn ceremony. The bride in her robes of crimson; her face whiter than the lace on her bosom; her lips cold and passionless; her eyes brilliant and hard as polished steel. The bridegroom, self-sustained, handsome, and triumphant; the dying man propped up on his pillows to look at the strange sacrifice.

The words were said; the responses uttered in the clear voice of the girl, and the calm, assured tones of the man; the lips of the haughty Winthrop touched the brow of his wife—and the fervent blessing of the expiring man was pronounced in a feeble voice upon the newly-wedded pair.

The great clock on the hall stairs pealed forth twelve strokes; the wintry winds rose to a fierce blast in the tortured elm trees; and through the lonely aisles and corridors of the hall the wind-voices sighed and moaned like tombless spirits.

And out into the night and darkness—out upon the unknown sea, whose waves wash the shores of eternity, went the soul of Robert Atherton, to meet its Judge; while stark and motionless lay the earthly part, shrouded for the coffin rest.

During the three days preceding the funeral, while the remains of Mr. Atherton lay in state, Winifred Winthrop wandered about the darkened rooms, pale and stern as a Nemesis. Not a feature of her frozen face softened; not a tear dimmed the brilliancy of her glittering eye.

Ashes to ashes, dust to dust, was the body of her father committed. In a carriage covered with black plumes, and drawn by sable horses, she followed it to Mount Auburn; she went down to the very door of the tomb, and saw the coffin laid by that of her mother; she turned away as the iron gate swung inward, and shut that beloved form forever from her sight—not a trace of emotion disturbed the marble immobility of her countenance.

Why should she weep and weary heaven with vain prayers? Was not her miserable fate decided?

CHAPTER IV.

THE SEVERING.

Drip! drip, oh, rain!

From the sky beclouded eaves!

Wail! wail, oh, wind,

That sweetest the wither'd leaves!

Sigh! sigh, oh, heart—

That vainly seekest rest!

Moan! moan, oh heart,

By grief and care oppress'd!

—HOUSEHOLD WORDS.

ONE night more beneath the beloved roof of Atherton Hall—one more night of liberty—and then Winifred was to go forth from its blessed shelter, to dwell in the stately mansion of her husband. Maplewood was a sea-side residence, a few miles above the ancient town of Plymouth, and so far away from Boston that Mr. Winthrop would not be at home more than twice a week, and for this Winifred felt grateful. The slavery, she thought, would be more tolerable while the master was absent.

This last night in the halls of her childhood she had demanded solitude; her maid was forbidden to intrude; and she asked of Mr. Winthrop, as a special favor, immunity from his society.

The night was bitter cold; the snow fell fiercely from an angry sky, and the icy north

wind whirled over the earth as though bent on an errand of destruction. For a couple of hours Winifred paced the chamber restlessly; at last she paused before a window, and throwing open the casement, leaned out into the darkness. The fury of the storm filled her with a wild delight. It was like the commotion in her own soul. She threw a shawl over her head, and stepping into the corridor, listened intently to satisfy herself that the household was wrapt in slumber.

Then she glided down the back staircase, undrew the great bolts of the outer door softly, and emerged into the cold and gloom. The piercing wind made her shiver, but the freshness and freedom of its breath gave her a mad strength, and she went on down the lawn, heedless of the drifts whose billowy whiteness obstructed the pathway.

On and on, her hand pressed hard against her heart, she flew; she had reached the pine copse-wood at the foot of the meadow, and was losing herself in its depths of shadow, when an outstretched human arm stayed her progress. A voice, strangely familiar, said:

"Winifred! Winifred! where are you fleeing?"

"Let me go! Let me go, Gerard Middleton! I am in no mood for company!"

"You shall not go until I tell you of the life-wrecked and heart-broken—of the terrible agony which another than yourself is enduring! Oh, why, why had I not been born a peer, or you a pauper?"

"It was not so decreed. And wherefore ask that question? It could not have changed my fate!"

"Winifred, our stations in life are different; a wide gulf in society separates us; but before God we are equal. As a friend, as an equal, I ask you do you love this man whom you have wedded?"

"Love him? It is desecrating the holy word of love to speak it in connection with his name."

"Winifred—I can not call you by your new title—one query more. Deem me what you will, I must relieve my heart of this crushing burden of doubt. Loving him not, do you love another?"

His face was close to hers; the dark intensity of his eyes searched her countenance. She did not speak, but the moon burst through its treble veil of clouds, and the pure ray of light fell down on the burning flush which crimsoned the cheek, brow, and bosom of the trembling girl. He was answered.

"For this moment, Winifred, I am happy. In loving and being beloved, why should despair find a place to dwell?"

"In being beloved!" she cried, bitterly; "has not the earth closed over the only one who loved me? Is not my path through life to lead me always over the barren fields and streamless deserts?"

"None to love you! Would to Heaven, Winifred, that I could tear out my heart, and fling it at your feet, that, seeing all its anguished throbbing, you might be convinced!"

She comprehended him—she knew then how well and earnestly she had been loved; for a moment the earth swam before her, then all her woe and despair surged forth in two simple words:

"Too late!"

His arms opened to enfold her—they held her madly to his breast; his lips rained down passionate kisses upon her face.

"It might have been! Oh, God!"

She tore herself away and stood erect—pale and cold as a chiseled statue.

"Gerard Middleton, I am a wife. My time of weakness is past; I am strong in the determination to do my duty! This love which might have created for us an earthly Paradise must, henceforth, make us strangers! To-night I bid you farewell forever!"

She held out her hand. He bowed his forehead upon it and said:

"The decree is just! Farewell!"

The next moment Gerard Middleton stood alone; and through the snow and sleet a dark figure made its hasty way up the avenue to Atherton Hall.

In the gray of the morning there was a knock at the door of the tiny cottage which served Ruth Mowbray both for a shop and dwelling-house. Ruth was mistress of her trade now and in business for herself, in a humble way.

The gentle mistress of the place unclosed the door, and admitted Gerard Middleton. She gave him a loving sister's greeting—the two were very dear to each other—and set a chair

for him by the cheerful little fire. She noticed his pale face and abstracted air, but she was a true and faithful friend to him—therefore she forbore troubling him with perplexing questions.

He gazed into the fire; she sewed diligently; both silent, yet both anxious. At length he started up, and flung himself down on the chintz-covered lounge—the only article of luxury which the frugal room contained.

"Ruth," he said, impatiently, "put down that work, and come and sit here by my side. I having confession to make."

She blushed, and her small hands trembled as she laid aside the garment on which she had been engaged. He drew her down on the lounge and retained the hand he had taken. She did not shrink from the touch; she rested herself in the perfect and child-like confidence she felt in him.

"You will call me presumptuous; you will say my punishment is just; but oh, Ruth, I am very miserable!"

The calm, blue eyes of the girl were lifted to his in earnest sympathy. She stroked back the bright hair from his temples with her soft fingers, saying simply:

"I am sorry, Gerard."

"Yes; I know you are, my child, and so I have come to you to pour out my distress. I am but a boy—nineteen years have but just passed over me, and yet I have all the strength and passion of manhood! I have awakened to the joy and sorrow of life—have known the honey and gall of existence—I have loved!"

She started, blushed; and then turned white as December snow.

"I have loved one as far above me as the stars are above the earth! A proud, beautiful, but tender-hearted girl! And for all her wealth and pride and beauty, she loved me in return!"

Ruth's disengaged hand shaded her face; she did not look up as she said:

"Well?"

"She loved me, but by the command of her father—her dying father—she wedded a man whom she loathes! My fate is black, but it is morning light compared with hers! Only think of it, Ruth; compelled to cling for life to one for whom she feels only aversion and hatred!"

"And you loved her, Gerard—you loved her deeply and strongly as you will never love again? You will keep unto her, and her only, as long as time with you shall endure?"

He marveled at the singular brilliancy of those blue eyes; he wondered at the blush which made her cheeks like damask roses—but oh, so dull of comprehension is man! he understood it not.

"Yes, Ruth, I loved her thus! No other woman will ever enter into her place in my heart; no other footstep will wake the echoes of that sealed chamber where her love is buried. Henceforth, I ignore the existence of Love; I live only for Fame and Fortune!"

His voice took a hard, stern tone as he proceeded, and his face looked cold and gray as hammered granite. Ruth, pale, silent, leaned against the wainscot. He went up to her, alarmed by her still rigidity.

"What ails you, dear Ruth? Why do you stand there so like a frozen thing?"

"I am cold," she drew near the fire. "It is a bitter morning!"

"Yes, truly; and your arms are bare. Let me wrap this shawl around you."

"Thank you; and now go on. I am listening."

"I have little more to add, except that I am going away—where scarcely I know; but I must flee from the place which holds her. I will not remain to tempt her and expose my own weakness. And now, Ruth, if, in after years, you shall hear men speak of Gerard Middleton as a cold, loveless being, you will remember that he once had a heart, but that a cruel fate took away its vitality and left it lead."

"Yes, I will remember."

"That is well. I must go now, Ruth, and God bless you. It may be a long, long time until I see you again. God, in heaven, bless, and prosper you!"

He held her for a moment in his brotherly arms, kissed her cheek with affection, and went from the house.

And Ruth, staggering back to a seat, cried out in sharp despair:

"Yes; he said it would be a long time ere we met again, and so it will! the length and darkness of the grave lies between then and now!"

CHAPTER V.

THE WAGES OF DESPAIR.

The bleak wind of March
Made her tremble and shiver;—
But not the dark arch,
Or black flowing river;
Mad from life's history,
Glad to death's mystery
Swift to be hurled—
Anywhere, anywhere,
Out of the world. —HOOD.

GROWING up to youth together, it was not strange that Gerard Middleton and Ruth Mowbray should be tenderly endeared to each other. Both were orphans, both were poor—both were struggling through the world to obtain a subsistence by manual labor. It was but natural, then, that their attachment should be strong, and their regard for each other deep and steadfast.

With Gerard this affection was that of a tender brother for a dear sister; with Ruth, it was the all-absorbing passion of her life. She never thought of happiness where Gerard was not; never dreamed of a heaven from whence he was excluded.

Purely and entirely she loved him; her life she would have given, any day, to have saved him a pang; all her hopes and joys were centered around him. She never paused to think of the consequences of this ardent love; she would have blushed with the veriest shame if it had been said to her, even in sport, "You love this Gerard Middleton."

Yet in her true and loyal heart she yielded up all on the shrine of this earthly idol.

Fearfully had she been punished! The golden dream had vanished.

The skies, lately so radiant, were gray and cold; earth stretched out before her a barren and dreary desert—there was no joy; no hope; no merciful grace there! Why should she stay to drag out a loveless existence in sorrow and tears? Why should her hair be blanched white by the weight of years, and her eyes grow dim with age before the sleep of the grave—its sweet, dreamless sleep came upon her?

She had not the courage to look the grim future in the face! The faith was small; her trust in God's gracious Providence weak. She said to herself she would go down to death, and thus rid her heart of its burden. There was rest in dust.

There would be none to mourn for her; Gerard, perhaps, might shed a few tears, but they would dry soon, and her name would pass from his remembrance. One little plunge beneath the bosom of the sparkling river—a little chillness as the great change crept on—a wondering of strangers over the drowned girl—and all would be over!

The night set in dark with storm-clouds. There was a dull, sleety breeze blowing; the tempest of yesterday had spent its fury, but the skirts of its garments yet trailed over the earth.

Ruth put her little room in order, trimmed the lamp and lighted a fire in the chimney-place. You would have thought from her scrupulous exactness, that a favored and welcome visitor was expected. When everything was arranged, she folded her shawl over her shoulders, and locking the door of the cottage behind her, she took the path through the snow, to the river.

She stood upon the high bank above the boiling flood—listened to the hollow murmur of the wind in the leafless trees, and the low gurgling voices of the waters as they hurried past.

A momentary trembling seized her—a cold hand seemed clutching at the warm fountains of her life—but she conquered the emotion, for the grave was not colder than the world—the desolate, heartless world!

She lifted her hands to heaven and cried aloud—"God receive me!"

The fatal spring was made—the earth crumbled from under her feet—the chill air from the river swept up and made her shudder—but she did not fall. A strong hand held her back—a grave, solemn voice said:

"Child! what would you do?"

"I would die!" she said, simply.

"Die! has God, then, called you? Do you dare to go unsummoned into the presence of the Ruler of heaven and earth—the Lord of Hosts, who has forbidden man to toy with the life which He has given?"

"I am weary and heart-sick, good sir; and the tomb gives a dreamless sleep."

"But the hereafter! Have you thought of that? the terrible hereafter! You are young and fair; your face is like the face of a child; why should you be weary of that life which you have just begun; and which strong men buffeted by a thousand storms, cling to tenaciously?"

"I am wretched and alone. Not a tie of kindred; not a soul on whom I have the slightest claim for care or protection! I have none to counsel me; none to advise!"

"If you will permit me to stand to you in a place of a brother, I will be all that a brother should!" said the young man gently—"but for comfort in this trial, through which you are evidently passing, you must look up to God, who alone can give peace to the troubled heart."

"I cannot look up! I have no courage; no strength!"

"Strength will come in answer to prayer, my sister; and not death, but life is the season for offering the petition. Will you come back to it?"

His friendly hand drew her away from the icy brink of the river; the strange persuasiveness of his voice brought a reaction of feeling to her sore spirit. She saw with measureless terror the frightful doom from which he had saved her.

"I will go back!" she cried earnestly—"I will shrink from no evil! Only show me the way to light once more!"

It seemed that he knew her residence, for he led her on up the path to the cottage which she had quit but a brief hour before. The lamp still burned brightly: the fire blazed cheerfully on the hearth. He seated her in a chair before the grate, removed her shawl with thoughtful care, for it was wet with snow, and then took a seat, himself on the opposite end of the hearth. During the space of silence which fell between these two so strangely brought together, Ruth had time to observe fully the face of her unknown guest.

This face was pale, its features finely, though delicately cut; the curve of the nostril indicated both firmness and courage, but the mouth was tender and beautiful as a woman's. It was a face of spiritual strength and beauty—the face of one who had lived and suffered.

"You are Ruth Mowbray! I recognized you at once, from having seen you sometimes at church. And I am John Rutherford, the pastor of Windfall."

She knew, now, to whom she owed her life—the young clergyman, whose burning eloquence, had won so many weary ones to rest their burdens at the foot of the Cross.

She arose, and held out her hand to him. From the fullness of her heart she spoke:

"Sir, you have saved my soul from death. For this I thank you. During the day and night which have gone I have been mad—but I trust the frenzy is over. Some time, to show you the truthfulness of my gratitude, and to prove to you that I had some cause for distress, I will confess to you what has never passed my lips. It will fill me with shame, yet I owe it to God for the sin I was about to commit against Him."

"Ruth, my sister, I ask of you no confidence which it is not your pleasure to give, but when you are saddened and oppressed, come to me freely, that I may share the weight of the burden."

He looked into her eye with calm scrutiny—his hand was upon the latch, to go.

"You will be true to yourself—you will think of that terrible self-destruction no more! I can trust you."

He smiled upon her hopefully, opened the door and passed out.

Ruth fell on her knees, and while thanking God that she had been taken from temptation, she prayed earnestly for that peace which passeth all understanding.

CHAPTER VI.

MAPLEWOOD.

The old, old sea, as one in tears,
Comes murmuring with its foamy lips,
—READE.

Thou shalt hear the "Never! never!" whispered by the phantom years,
And a song from out the distance is ringing in thine ears;

And an eye shall vex thee looking ancient kindness on thy pain,
Turn thee, turn thee on thy pillow, get thee to thy rest again.

Nay, not nature brings thee solace; for a tender voice will cry—

"'Tis a purer life than thine—a lip to drain thy trouble dry."
—TENNYSON.

THE family mansion of Mr. Winthrop stood on a high bluff of land, some fifty rods from the coast. It was a wildly picturesque situation, commanding a glorious view of the long reach of Cape Cod, and the gleaming bosom of Massachusetts bay.

The house was a large, old, rambling struc-

ture, brightened by numerous modern additions, and fortified on all sides by innumerable piazzas, balconies and verandas, from all of which the bleak shores of Plymouth were distinctly visible. There were a few trees, such as flourish on the sea-shore—trees of grand proportions, which had been beaten by the storms of many a winter.

The whole spacious interior of the house was fitted up in a style of grandeur rarely seen on this side of the Atlantic, and the room appropriated to Winifred was in itself a miracle of magnificence. It was the entire size of an octagonal tower, in the western wing of the building; and its southern winding opened upon the superb gardens and shrubbery, which were Mr. Winthrop's especial pride.

The walls of this *boudoir* were hung with pictures, by the old masters, in frames of carved rosewood; the floor was laid with an exquisite pattern of crimson flowers, on a ground of pale-brown velvet. The chairs and sofas were covered with the costliest *velours de Venise*, and the heavy silken curtains were looped back with bands of enameled gold.

The work-table, mantle and *etageres* were all inlaid with pearl—rare specimens of work, imported from a foreign country. There was a harp, a cabinet piano in a gilded case, strewn with choice pieces of music. Books there were in elegant bindings, with clasps of gold, and emitting faint odors of perfume, soft as the breath of Araby's breezes; but Winifred shuddered as she looked on the illuminated pages. These were volumes of her husband's choice; and, for the first time she came to the knowledge that she had wedded an infidel! one who denied the existence of God, and believed in no principle of the Christian religion.

In exquisite caskets though these books were held, their contents were vile poison; and Winifred, brought up as she had been in the strict tenets of a Protestant church, abhorred the sight of these tokens of infidelity. Her soul loathed them as unclean things, which it would tarnish the lips to read, and stain the heart to comprehend. And she cast them all together into a cabinet, closed and locked the door, and flung the key far out of the window. If this was superstitious error, it was on the side of truth.

A moment afterward, Mr. Winthrop entered the chamber. His eye fell upon the table where the books had been; he missed them, evidently, but made no inquiry for their fate.

"How does the arrangement of Mrs. Winthrop's apartment please her?" he asked.

"Mr. Winthrop has taken unnecessary care in its appointments," she replied; "the prisoned bird does not mind whether its cage be gold or iron!"

Mr. Winthrop smiled, his teeth glistening whitely through his black mustache.

"The bird will beat its wings until from sheer weariness it becomes content." His voice was soft and smooth; its intonation resembled a strain of music, but there was a world of cunningly-hidden sarcasm in the sweet tones.

A disdainful curl wreathed Winifred's lips, but she vouchsafed no other reply; and finding her disinclined for conversation of any kind, he bade her a courteous good-evening and quitted the apartment.

Winifred's life at Maplewood was like that of many another proud, beautiful woman, wedded to a man for whom no love is entertained. A fate the hardest and bitterest that can fall to the lot of woman! A home without love—a union but in name—a wretched farce, to which death alone can draw down the curtain.

The house was always filled with distinguished guests, for Mr. Winthrop stood high in the social and political world; and eminent statesmen, poets, artists and orators made up the coterie of his personal friends.

And among them all, Winifred moved with her own stately grace and beauty—an acknowledged queen. The splendor of her attire, the brilliancy of her jewels, but, above all, the perfection of her loveliness, made her the envy of her own sex, and the admiration of the other.

In truth, she was well fitted to preside over the establishment of Mr. Winthrop; and in all the circle of that gentleman's acquaintance, he knew of no lady whom he would have preferred to install in the place of his wife.

Winifred was seldom alone with her husband—she carefully avoided him except on occasions when avoidance would have attracted remark; and at such times there was no confidence, no communion of spirit between them. They were oil and water—the one had no affinity for the other.

In all things Winifred studied to obey her hus-

band; his slightest wishes were her laws. She had said to herself that in expiation of her weakness in yielding to an unsought love, she would be to Mr. Winthrop a true, faithful and obedient wife. She felt for him no affection; therefore she was cold and calm toward him, and his demeanor to her partook of the same haughty indifference.

In one thing only did she defy him. When he requested her to give up her attendance at church—a wild and fanatical proceeding of which he did not approve—she replied no! Mr. Winthrop might do as he chose for himself; but as for her, so long as she lived she would worship God after the manner of her ancestors.

And, looking into her sternly flashing eyes and flinty face, he knew that it would not be safe to urge the matter, so he allowed the subject to drop.

Two years of this existence—it could scarcely be called *life*—and, outwardly, Winifred was unchanged, save that her loveliness had ripened and grown more perfect. Envied, admired and flattered as she was, not an hour of happiness had she known since the doors of Atherton Hall had closed behind her, when she had gone forth a bride.

The name of Gerard Middleton never passed her lips; with jealous care she kept her thoughts from wandering after him; but close against her heart she wore a cluster of dead arbutus flowers—his first and last gift. And those dearly-cherished flowers told more than mere words.

Winifred Winthrop's twentieth birthday approached; it arrived, at length. The air was fragrant with spring's sweetest blossoms, but there was no feasting nor joy at Maplewood. A night of wild doubt and anxiety, at times of dismay, drew on; but with the morning light came a happy consummation.

Mrs. Winthrop was the mother of a fine boy!

The father's delight was unspeakable. For the first time in his life a thrill warmer than admiration swept through his being for his wife, because she had brought him this great blessing.

A son to bear his proud name, to inherit his vast fortune, to keep up the honor of his family!

Maplewood was thrown open to rejoicing. Laughter echoed around the lofty halls, lamps flashed, wine flowed, and in her darkened chamber languished the young wife, struggling with weakness—praying for life only that she might enjoy it with her precious child.

Who can fathom the depth of tenderness in the heart of a mother? Who can feel for that little helpless waif of humanity like her who has suffered to bring it into existence? Whose care is like hers, so gentle and tender? Who else on earth loves a little child but its mother?

It was strange to see how Winifred's proud heart softened and grew tender as an angel's toward that wee child. When she was able to rise from her bed, she would sit, for hours, gazing into its soft, dark eyes, and twisting its silken hair about her fingers. The servants said their mistress idolized the babe; and so it seemed, for never upon any account would she permit it to sleep away from her breast, and no amusement was powerful enough in its attraction to draw her from the care of her son.

Mr. Winthrop named the boy William, after its paternal grandfather, but Winifred shortened it to Willie—the word had a sweeter sound, she said.

Strongly as she was attached to Willie, her love met with a full return. Before he was three months old, he had learned to love her sheltering arms above any other resting-place. He wailed piteously when taken away from her but for a moment; and when a year had passed over his bright head, and he had begun to toddle carefully about from one thing to another, he would never quit the protecting clasp of her hand, or go to the arms of strangers. He seemed to shrink from his father, and would kiss no one save his mother, either for threats or persuasions.

CHAPTER VII.

THE WORLD'S HONORS AND A SEASON'S MYSTERIES.

From lofty hills and fertile vales,
From hut and palace halls,
From hamlet, town and city's din,
The country's clarion calls!
And men go forth with swelling hearts,
To win an empty name—
They quaff their wine from golden cups,
And call the bubble Fame.—ANONYMOUS.

TIDINGS long deferred, and anxiously expected, came at last. The political canvass for a

senator to Congress, from the district in which Mr. Winthrop resided, had been a close and laborious one, but it was over, at length, and Milford Winthrop was the successful candidate. His name was enrolled among the honorables of his country; there was a seat in the senate hall, at Washington, waiting for his occupancy.

He was very proud of the result, won by his money more than by his worth, and he entered his wife's room with an elastic step. He was the bearer of important tidings, and he gave her them with an air of extreme satisfaction.

"Mrs. Winthrop, you are a senator's wife."

She bowed her head over her child, and simply said, in reply:

"Very well, Mr. Winthrop."

Three months spent in preparation, and then the newly-elected senator and his wife set out for Washington. Winifred had hoped to be left at home, but Mr. Winthrop was proud of her regal beauty, and this beauty could only be gratified by the display of his treasure. He was not content with admiring her himself; he wanted others to see and appreciate the jewel he had in his possession, and no consideration for this lady's wishes would have induced him to forego the gratification of this feeling.

So to the gay capital went Mrs. Winthrop and her child.

An elegant mansion, on Madison Square, received them, in whose spacious drawing-rooms Mrs. Winthrop held receptions unequalled in brilliancy even by those of the President himself.

Her resplendent beauty and queenly bearing were the constant themes of Washington society. The *je ne sais quoi* of her grace, and the statuesque repose of her perfect features filled every beholder with admiration. Her dresses were copied, her sayings quoted, and she became the model for all the ladies in the fashionable capital.

Once, and once only, during the season, had the long silent chords of buried love been stirred in the bosom of the fair Mrs. Winthrop.

A party of inspection were dispatched to New York, by the Administration, to examine some water-works there which had been complained of as defective. Some of the gentlemen on the committee took their wives along with them for the pleasure of the trip, and by invitation Winifred accompanied Senator Gordon and his lady.

It was a beautiful day in early summer—calm, cool and cloudless, and Winifred wandered off a little way from her party, and directly found herself standing on the quay, from whence a European steamer was about to sail. She glanced hurriedly over the passengers, and was about turning away, when an unaccountable thrill shot through her being. She could neither explain nor analyze the feeling; it was a return of old memories and emotions which she had believed long since in ashes. Some person brushed hastily past her—so near that his arm grazed the folds of her shawl. She lifted her eyes and gazed after him. His firm step sounded on the connecting plank; his dark hair was tossed and threaded by the fresh ocean breeze; and for one little moment the form of Gerard Middleton daguerreotyped itself against the sky.

Then the bell sounded; the moorings were cast off, and the gallant boat steamed rapidly down the river. Winifred entered the office and looked over the list of passengers. The very first line was filled with what she was looking for:

"Gerard Middleton, from Boston, bound to Havre, via Liverpool."

The August heats were approaching, but Congress had not yet concluded its session. An unusual press of business still detained the august body at the metropolis; but most of the members' families had left town for some rural place of resort.

Winifred began to languish for the cool air of the country; and Mr. Winthrop proposed that she should spend a few weeks at Newport or the Virginia Springs. To this she objected; she wanted rest and quiet rather than a mere change of excitement: some retired place in the country would answer every purpose.

She had heard much of the fine natural scenery of Rappahannock county, and she desired to pass the remainder of the summer in some little village of that mountainous region.

At the mention of Rappahannock county, Mr. Winthrop became strangely agitated.

"Madam, you will do me a favor by never again referring to this out-of-the-way place as a summer residence. The plan is abominable."

"Why should you object, sir, to a section of country justly celebrated for its salubrious airs and beautiful scenery? Since it meets my wishes, I hardly see what cause you have for in-

terfering in the matter!" Winifred spoke coldly and haughtily—and he replied as coldly.

"I have sufficient cause. My son is to go with you, I presume; and it becomes me to see that he is carried to a proper place. As for my reasons for taking exception to Rappahannock county, it is sufficient that I object!"

And for the time the subject dropped.

A few days afterward, Mr. Winthrop obtained leave of absence from congressional duties, and took a journey into the interior of Virginia. When he returned, he declared that his objections to Rappahannock county were entirely removed. Business, he said, had called him into that section, and he had found it all that could be desired for a temporary sojourn. So well had he been pleased, that he had engaged an old mansion a few miles beyond Warrenton—close to the Blue Ridge—and caused it to be fitted up for the reception of his wife and child.

"Bellemonte"—so the place was called, had been a fine old estate, but the family to which it had belonged were mostly dead; and of late, Bellemonte had been sadly neglected.

Mr. Winthrop had secured a trusty negro and his wife to preside over the establishment; and this worthy couple, with Jack, the coachman, and Fanny the cook, would comprise the kitchen household. Mrs. Winthrop might take with her as many attendants as she chose.

Winifred immediately commenced her preparations for leaving Washington. Two days afterward she set forth, Mr. Winthrop accompanying her as an escort; and Rosy, her own maid, to attend to the personal wants of her mistress.

After seeing his wife safely installed at Bellemonte, Mr. Winthrop bade her farewell and returned to Washington.

Bellemonte was a wildly beautiful spot, in the near vicinity of the lofty hills known as the Blue Ridge. It was thickly wooded with fir-trees of a stunted growth; and half the plantation was covered with huge boulders, which the spring floods from time to time had rolled down from the mountains.

The old mansion itself was dreary and weird enough for any tale of darkness that might be related of it. It was a house where men had lived and died; and one of our noblest poets says that all such are "haunted houses."

The rooms were low and dark from the creeping vines that covered the windows: the wainscots were black with age, and rotten and worm-eaten in many places. The chambers were mostly hung with tapestry, once wrought in beautiful patterns of gorgeous colors, by fair fingers now moldering perchance like their work; and the furniture—all of dark oak, must have belonged to another generation.

A large portion of the house was uninhabitable; but in the north wing, facing the mountains, three apartments, on the first floor, had been fitted up, not only comfortably, but luxuriously.

The sleeping-room of Winifred and her child was a cheerful, cosy place; its high, narrow windows commanded a bold view of the hills, and Winifred only regretted that the basement was at this point so very high as to preclude all idea of getting to the ground from the spacious balcony. She thought she would have liked to go out for her walks, from the room, rather than be obliged to traverse the whole length of a gloomy corridor, amid the ruins, to reach the hall door.

Bellemonte was the property of a family by the name of Brandon, the only remaining member of which was far away. And this was all the information that Winifred could obtain by questioning Aunt Phillis, the colored house-keeper, who was remarkably taciturn for one of her class.

One apartment of the old house, rescued from the general decay by recent repairs, was a very Blue Beard's chamber of horrors to the fancy of Winifred. It was much like the other rooms in its vicinity, save that across the windows were strong iron bars; and the doors were secured with treble bolts *upon the outside*. There was no fireplace or other convenience for warmth, and the walls were covered with thick green baize.

"Phillis," said Mrs. Winthrop, seeking the old woman in the kitchen, "there is a room in close vicinity to mine that has aroused my curiosity."

"Deed, missus, dat's mighty cur'us," replied Phillis, giving the saucepan she was scouring a vigorous rub with her black hand.

"Can you tell me what it was used for? The room with the bolts on the outside of the door, and the walls covered with green flannel, I mean."

"Like enough it was de parlor."

"But the bars across the windows? and the lack of a fireplace, and the green cloth?" continued Winifred, interrogatively.

"Bars to keep the owls out, and green good for bad eyes I've hearn say. Seems to me, missus is mighty 'squisitive."

And with this reasonable solution of the green-room mystery, Winifred was obliged to content herself.

The days passed pleasantly enough at Bellemonte, save that the mistress had too much time for thought. She was alone once more; free to enjoy undisturbed the society of her darling child, now a beautiful boy of two years; but in spite of this sweet satisfaction, she found her thoughts constantly recurring to the pleasant evenings spent in the parlor of Atherton Hall with Gerard Middleton.

And, try as she would, those old memories could not be stifled; and when the anguish which they caused became too great to bear, she would take little Willie in her arms and set out on a long ramble over the hills.

One August night, Mrs. Winthrop sat in her chamber trying to read; Willie slumbered in his crib by her side; Rosy was in bed in the adjoining room, and every thing around the house was hushed to the profoundest quiet.

It had been one of those sultry days peculiar to ripe summer, and the dull, torpid atmosphere was prolific of repose. Her book was uninteresting; the lamp burned dimly; a house-fly droned lazily on the window; and Winifred, acted upon by surrounding influences, sunk back in her chair and fell asleep.

She was awakened suddenly by some strange sound. The lamp had gone out, but the starlight streamed faintly into the room. Plainly discernible in the gloom of the place was a tall, gaunt figure, with eyes like live coals, and long hair, white as snow, streaming around it like a shroud! This horrible shape advanced and leaned over the bed of little Willie; one skinny hand was extended, bearing aloft a glittering knife; the other held back the delicately-embroidered silk of the coverlet from the form of the innocent sleeper!

Winifred, with a fierce cry, leaped to her feet and confronted the strange visitant.

A wild, demoniac "Ha! ha! ha!" burst from the creature's lips, and simultaneously it melted away, as by some invisible agency, leaving the terror-stricken mother alone with her child.

Recovering herself by a powerful effort, Winifred searched the room with the strictest scrutiny. She left no nook nor corner unexamined—yet she discovered nothing. She looked to the doors and windows—they were securely fastened, and yet, a guest had been admitted to her very bed-chamber.

It was not a dream; she was fully convinced of that. It was something real and tangible, but of what nature? She did not believe in supernatural appearances; she was not superstitious; and yet, a cold, shuddering thrill ran through her as she held the babe to her breast.

She watched the night away, for she could not have slept with that strange, inexplicable fear at her heart. She resolved to say nothing to any one of the occurrence; Rosy was exceedingly timid, and the negroes invariably kept one eye, at least, out for ghosts, and they would be afraid to remain in the house if they once got wind of the idea that the place was haunted; and she had no wish to be left alone. So she kept silent and watchful.

August was drawing to a close. The middle of September Mrs. Winthrop was to leave Bellemonte, and return to Maplewood, where she would remain until the winter session of Congress should usher in the gay season at Washington.

It was a bright summer day, and the unusual coolness of the air had invited to out-of-door exercise. Winifred had indulged herself in a very long walk, and being quite weary, she went to her bed earlier than was her custom. Willie had coaxed mamma to lie down beside him and tell him a story; and the simple tale finished, the two, mother and child, were locked in slumber.

Willie's head was nestled close to his mother's bosom, her bright, soft curls mingled with the brown rings that clustered around his full white forehead.

Winifred slept uneasily—a vague sense of insecurity had oppressed her all the day, and her slumber was troubled with wild dreams and distorted visions.

The touch of some cold substance upon her face awoke her. She knew not what this substance was, but it struck an icy chill to her heart. She lifted her hand to push it away, and

that wild, unearthly "Ha! ha! ha!" heard once before, burst on the air.

With a terrified cry Winifred sprung from the couch and peered into the gloom. The same demon face, with horrible blood-red eyes and snow-white hair, hovered above her! The same savage teeth, with the lips drawn tightly away from them, glittered before her!

Winifred bounded forward, and seizing the heavy bronze candlestick, hurled it at the intruder. The light was extinguished as the missile fell; there was a dull, dead sound as of the closing of a great door at some immeasurable distance—and the silence of death fell upon the chamber.

Willie slept quietly in his bed, and Winifred stood alone in the center of the floor.

CHAPTER VII.

THROUGH THE SHADOW OF DEATH.

Yet, though thou wear'st the glory of the sky,
Wilt thou not keep the same beloved name?
The same fair form and gently-beaming eye?
Lovelier in heaven's sweet climate; yet the same!
—BRYANT.

It was a horrible mystery! Winifred longed, yet trembled, to fathom it. She hoped not to be obliged to ask for aid. She would rather encounter all the danger, if danger there was, and run all the risks.

Night followed night, and during the dark hours that determined woman never closed her eyes. What little rest she had was taken by day, when the household were astir, and Rosy awake to take charge of the child.

Winifred's father had but one brother, named George, and this George Atherton was one of the bravest and most daring men in the country. He had hardly earned the title of colonel, and though now an old man, he had always taken great delight in teaching his niece the use of warlike weapons. To please the old colonel, the girl had taken lessons in fencing, and was quite an adept in the use of firearms. In a sportive moment her father had presented her with a case of pistols, and these little desperate weapons had been for years in the false bottom of her trunk.

Now she took them out, loaded the barrels carefully, and placed them on the stand by her bedside, resolved that if she should be again favored with a visit from the mysterious fiend that had twice appeared to her, to try the effect of cold lead upon it.

But it did not seem likely that her courage would be tested. Time passed on monotonously, without variation, and but two nights more remained to Winifred at Bellemonte.

The intervening day must be spent in packing and making other needful arrangements for traveling; and wearied and drowsy, Winifred threw herself upon the lounge, without undressing, to catch a few moments' repose before the depth of the night should come. She knew that all her strength would be required for her labors of to-morrow.

She gave Rosy imperative orders to remain awake until she called her; and the girl, seated before the little fire, which the dampness of the night had made agreeable, with an entertaining novel in her hand, readily promised obedience.

Winifred soon fell asleep, for she was very weary, and she knew nothing more till she heard the hall-clock striking one.

She started up and put out her arm to clasp her child, but he was not by her side! His place was empty—he was gone! A wild shriek rose to her lips, but she stifled it instantly. Rosy must have taken him up, she said to herself, by way of assurance. She flew to the side of the girl—Rosy was sound asleep.

"Willie! where is Willie?" demanded the distracted mother, in a frenzy of suspense.

Rosy rubbed her eyes, and stared around her with a blank air.

"I have not seen him, madam," she said, "since I laid him down on the bed with you. As I hope for heaven, mistress, I have not!"

Oh! but those who called Mrs. Winthrop cold and passionless should have seen her then.

She roused the whole household instantly, and searched the mansion in mad haste. She went herself into the deepest recesses of the moldy, tomb-like cellars, and through the heavily-framed arches which supported the massive weight of the buildings.

Flambeaux were lighted, and the terrified negroes, led on by that resolute woman, searched every dell and dingle and ransacked every hovel in the vicinity. Slaves from the nearest plantations turned out and joined them, their quick sympathies awakened by the cry:

"The child of the lady of Bellemonte has been stolen!"

All day the search went on; Winifred, pale, but firm, leading the van, and returning at nightfall only to see if her husband had arrived.

Mr. Winthrop had flown to the spot at the first alarm of the telegraph.

A more wildly despairing man was never seen. His face was shrouded in a deathly pallor, his thin lips were rigid as those of a corpse, and his eyes seemed ready to start from their sockets. A couple of miles behind his horse had fallen dead under him, unable to endure the pace at which he was ridden; and the fresh animal that had been procured at Warrenton, was bathed in foam.

Mr. Winthrop grasped his wife rudely by the arm, and demanded the particulars of his son's loss. Coldly and briefly she revealed all to him—keeping nothing back.

He struck his forehead with his clenched hand.

"Great God!" he cried, madly, "it is as I thought. Oh, fool—fool that I was to consent to have my innocent child brought to the place where she drew breath! I might have known—but, oh heaven, how fearfully am I punished!" He turned to the gaping negroes. "Saddle the fleetest horse in the stables! and you, Jack, get upon the other, and follow me over the mountains! I must reach Woodstock before day-break!"

Winifred would have accompanied the horsemen, but Mr. Winthrop thrust both her and her maid into a chamber, and locked the door upon them.

Who can imagine the feelings of the wretched mother while thus incarcerated!

The night wore on—a night of anguished suffering to Winifred Winthrop. She paced the narrow limits of her chamber unceasingly; throwing open the casement, and leaning far out into the darkness in the vain hope of hearing some sound indicative of the return of those gone in search of her child. No sound broke the stillness.

Rosy had sobbed herself to sleep on the floor; they two were isolated from the other women of the establishment—confined and helpless; but Winifred never thought of fear. She would have braved ten thousand deaths, if the act could have restored to her her Willie.

At last the day broke open the eastern gates; the morning came, and the sun arose clear and smiling. Winifred took up her station at a window which commanded a view of the path taken by Mr. Winthrop, and with fixed gaze she watched for the first indications of the return. She thought she perceived a dark, moving object, away on the very verge of the horizon—a mere speck—it grew larger—yes, there were two of them—two horsemen! They wound slowly down the mountain—she recognized them now; Mr. Winthrop bearing a bundle in his arms, carefully enveloped in a cloak, and the negro Jack following behind!

They were approaching the house; she could endure confinement no longer! Grasping the massy iron poker from the fender, she brought it to bear with all her strength against the door. Again and again the blow fell—the white oak quivered; the bolts held fast, but the hinges were old and rusty, and could not withstand the strain. They yielded; another frantic blow, they broke; the door flew open with a crash, and Winifred dashed out into the corridor and down the stairs.

She reached the outer door just as the equestrians rode up. Mr. Winthrop strove to avoid her, but she sprang upon him, and, with the strength of a giantess, tore the cloaked burden from his arms.

The man seemed to be enraged by the action—all the fierce passions of his nature leaped hotly into his face.

"Give him to me! Dead as he is, I claim him! He is mine—mine only!" he cried, savagely. "Was it not enough, madam, that you should insist on bringing him here to certain destruction? And now you would again take him from me!"

"Hush! I am his mother! And would to Heaven that none of your blood ran in his veins, as none of your inhuman passions ever dwelt in his breast!"

Winifred was stung by her husband's harshness. All the high, proud temper of an Ather-ton was aroused. And he, enraged and imbibed by the state of an awakened conscience, and rendered, by grief, but little better than a maniac, forgot his manhood, and struck her!

She staggered beneath the blow. For a moment her white face took the sanguinary hue of the red rose. But when she spoke, her voice was calm and full.

"For this, I renounce all allegiance to the wretch I have called husband! Henceforth I am a free woman!"

She turned slowly away, and bore the cold burden into the house. Her heart had already told her what she might expect. With fearful composure, she uncovered the body of her child, and gazed upon the dead face. She kissed it tenderly—stroking the dark hair, and murmuring softly:

"Dear Willie! Dear little Willie!"

She asked Mr. Winthrop no questions concerning the night's adventures; but Jack told her all that he knew, in a few words.

Mr. Winthrop had ridden hard, and crossed the most elevated spur of the mountain a little below Front Royal, and had then pushed on rapidly until the Shenandoah river was reached.

He had intended to cross the stream, but it was swollen by recent rains, and it was difficult to find a ford. In searching for this, the body of little Willie was accidentally discovered. It lay close to the water, in the dark shadow of a clump of alders—the man said—and it was his master's opinion that it had died from strangulation. There was a dark circle around the delicate throat, and marks of human fingers deep and purple in the soft flesh! Also, around the place where the remains were found, there were prints of human footsteps in the wet sand, and some shreds of a woman's clothing adhered to a thorn-bush in the vicinity. And this was all that was known, and from such scanty information what inference was to be drawn?

Terrible suspicions touching Milford Winthrop, came to Winifred's ears from the neighboring people; the dark veil which covered his darker past life, was partially undrawn; and, what she saw and understood was enough to make her shrink with abhorrence from her husband; the man whom the world admired—the distinguished senator!

Winifred's great and overwhelming grief for her child swallowed up all lesser trouble, and for the seven days which followed his death, she walked like one in a trance.

Mechanically she prepared herself to leave Bellemonte; mechanically she suffered them to take her to Washington, and from thence to Maplewood.

Like one without life or feeling, she looked upon her boy in his coffin, and saw him laid in the grave, high above the moaning of the sea on the sandy shore. And when the sods were laid smoothly over his grave, and she had put her aching forehead to the cool turf to still its wild throbbings, she arose, and stood up alone, knowing that her duty here was ended!

CHAPTER IX.

FINDING PEACE.

Friend, thou must trust in Him who trod before
The desolate paths of life;
Must bear in meekness, as He meekly bore,
Sorrow and toil and strife.
Trust then in Him, and yield not to despair!
Christ, in His heaven of heavens, will hear thy prayer!

—From the German of Uhland.

THE acquaintance so singularly begun between Ruth Mowbray and Mr. Rutherford, progressed steadily, until it ripened into perfect confidence.

In the young pastor Ruth found a kind and sympathizing friend; a tender brother. He encouraged her when she desponded—cheered her when she was sad—led her gently on to seek peace and rest upon the eternal arm of God's salvation! She went to his church—listened to his discourses, so searching, yet so full of love; and understood why his people almost worshipped him. He was poor in this world's goods, but rich in heavenly treasures. Here, he walked humbly with the lowly ones of earth; there, in the realms of glory, no angel would wear a brighter crown than he!

One evening, when she had known him for more than a year, Ruth revealed to this kind friend the little history of her life. She told him of her hopeless, unsought love; of her mad despair, and temptation—the rest, he already knew.

He comforted her as none other could have done; then, to show her that he fully appreciated her confidence, he gave her his own in return.

"I was born," he said, "in the great, bustling city of New Orleans, of parents who toiled for their daily bread. My father was a house carpenter; my mother added something to our scanty income by fine needle-work. When I was about fifteen my poor father was fatally injured by the fall of a staging. I remember well my mother's despair when they brought him home, and the surgeon said that his days

were numbered! He died the next day, in great agony. After the funeral expenses were paid, we found ourselves almost without a penny! My mother redoubled her exertions, and I was fortunate enough to secure a situation as clerk. I had, always by dint of much economy, been kept at school, and my education was uncommonly good for a lad of my age. Every leisure moment was devoted to study.

"Through the kindness of a schoolmaster, I was enabled to read many valuable works. Under his auspices I gained an acquaintance with the classics. At length, I became a teacher. The salary was better than that which I received from my present employers, and the labors more congenial! I accordingly entered upon the charge of the school. Here, again, I owed much to my good old friend. In all difficulties I went to him; and, whatever success crowned my efforts, I must attribute to his judicious advice. By degrees, I rose to be assistant-preceptor in a flourishing academy, in the State of North Carolina; and here I first met Catharine Hazelwood.

"That meeting was an era in my life. Miss Hazelwood was a New Englander, but having family connections in the South, she had come hither to finish her education, and at the same time to benefit her health. I can hardly convey to you a correct idea of this girl's exceeding beauty. She was one of the loveliest creatures I ever beheld. I think it was a case of love at first sight on my part; and I flattered myself that the fair girl was not wholly indifferent to me. She blushed at my approach—her hand trembled when it met mine in friendly greeting. If I had cause (with others of her class) to reprove her for badly learned lessons, her eyes would swim in tears.

"Catharine was the only daughter and heiress of a wealthy father, and, in consequence, had been the belle of the quiet country village which she called home. Now, at school, her wealth and beauty were passports to favor, and she reigned a very queen. Sometimes I thought her proud and coquettish, but a single glance of her beautiful eyes disarmed all feelings but those of love, and I was more completely her slave than before. Strange it is that men with all their boasted power will be so blind that the simplest school-girl can deceive the best of them!

"But I would not blame Catharine. She had been petted and flattered till the good in her nature was almost eradicated, and she was a most arrant coquette. She led me on to hope—my ardent devotion was very pleasant to her; and when, at length, I confessed all, and besought her to read my fate, she did not cast me utterly away. But I must wait, she said. She liked me—perhaps she loved me a little, but we were both young, and I was comparatively uneducated. She had set her heart, she said, on marrying a *learned* man, and I must oblige her by becoming this. A college course would improve me; when I had graduated with honor, she would give me a more definite answer. Inspired by hope, I taxed body and mind to the utmost. When twenty years of age, I entered the University at Chapel Hill, in advance. My dear mother sacrificed many a sorely-needed comfort that my darling wish might be accomplished; and, as for myself, my life was bound up in the acquirement of knowledge. I wrote to Catharine many times—letters filled with fire and devotion—and twice she wrote me in return. These letters were kept next my heart, and read and re-read scores of times a day. You will think me an enthusiast, dear Ruth, but I was little more than a boy then, and worshipped my mistress with a boy's passionate fervor.

"I spent two years at Chapel Hill; and then, with the laurels of that fine old institution fresh and green on my brow, I bade farewell to my mother, and set out for Middleburg, Catharine's home—to lay them at her feet. I did not reach Middleburg until after the shades of evening had fallen, but, weary as I was, I could not wait until morning to see Catharine. I sought out her father's house, a large and handsome building, in a quiet, aristocratic street. The mansion was lighted up as if for a festival. Colored lamps swung from the shrubbery in the gardens; and a score of elegant equipages were drawn up before the door. The great parlors were one flood of radiance; and I entered together with a fresh reinforcement of guests.

"And judge, if you can, of the emotions that filled my soul when standing hidden behind the silken window-curtains, I saw Catharine Hazelwood married to a man twice her years—a man rich in lands and stocks—who had won her with his gilded offerings!

"I sought an interview with the bride, and charged her with her falsity in no measured terms. She laughed in my face. She hoped, she said, that I was not so shallow as to think anything of that youthful flirtation. It had amused her finely in that dull old school-day life—she should have died of *ennui* if it had not been for me, and she most heartily thanked me for the favor I had done her in helping her kill time. Now, she trusted I would ignore the past, and regard her simply as a very good friend.

"I went out from her presence a changed man. I had seen my infatuation; my glaring ideal stood before me robbed of the love which had clothed her in the perfection of womanliness! I no longer thrilled at the sound of her name. My passion had died a violent death, and I buried it, and placed upon its sepulcher the stone of indifference. Henceforth, I resolved to live for others rather than for myself. I took the armor of the most high God upon me, and His gospel into my mouth! In this service I found happiness—happiness such as the world is powerless to give—or take away! Peace, founded on the Rock of Everlasting Love!

"I brought my mother here to your pleasant New England, and here we have set up our humble home; and here I hope to spend the remainder of my days in content. I ask no higher destiny than that which awaits me as a minister of God's truth, and may He aid me to so exercise my one talent that good may be done unto my people!"

And this was John Rutherford's life history, and Ruth wept over his disappointment, and smiled over his victory.

After this mutual confidence, a strong attachment grew between Ruth Mowbray and the young minister.

CHAPTER X.

THE MILLINER'S FORTUNE.

In life can love be bought with gold?
Are friendship's pleasures to be sold?

—DR. JOHNSON.

RUTH MOWBRAY went often to the parsonage, and sat at the feet of the mild-browed woman whom John Rutherford called mother, and listened to the teaching that fell from her lips. Mrs. Rutherford was a gentle spirit, trusting all her hopes and wishes unreservedly in God's hands, complaining never of fate, and enduring trials and crosses with saintly patience. Would that there were more like her, that their holy example might lead many, now in doubt, to the true source of all happiness and everlasting safety!

And gradually the heart of Ruth Mowbray took up a new song. At first its notes were low and feeble, but gathering strength with the nurturing lapse of time, it widened and broadened until its mighty surges swept the master-chords of her being into perfect harmony.

At the sound of *one* footstep she blushed and trembled; at the touch of *one* hand she was filled with strange bliss: *one* voice had power to banish all care and sorrow from her soul!

Typhus fever, of the most virulent kind, broke out in Windfall. Almost every house was a house of sickness, and perhaps of death. Whole families were swept away, and terror seized upon the whole population.

In this time of universal sorrow, Ruth Mowbray was a good angel. She ministered unceasingly at the bedside of the sick and dying, and many a desolate, suffering one was made comfortable by her kind care. No hand was softer than hers on the hot brow, and no footstep fell so noiselessly on the distracted ear.

Mr. Rutherford, also, visited the sick untiringly, and administered to their necessities with his own hands; he comforted the living, and prayed for the repose of the dead.

As the cooler weather of autumn approached, the fever cases diminished, and the fearful mortality was abated. But there were still scores of the afflicted, and Ruth Mowbray's services as "watcher" were almost nightly called into requisition.

For two nights she had kept a vigil by the bed of an aged woman, and at daybreak closed her eyes in death, and now on the third night, she was looking forward to the luxury of undisturbed repose. She retired early to her chamber, and without undressing lay down on the bed. But sleep, so much wished for, refused to come. In vain she covered her eyes with her hand, in vain she counted the ticking of the clock, and fancied herself on the verge of dream-land—she was wide awake as ever. She thought that perhaps the light of the stars

shining through her window at the foot of her bed troubled her, and rising she let down the curtain. But no, sleep still held aloof. The clock struck one, and almost simultaneously with the sound, a dull red glare shone into the chamber. It was not the moon, for that had set long ago behind the western hills. Brighter and redder gleamed the light. Ruth sprang up and threw open the window. The whole vicinity was glowing like noonday, and the sky glowed red as blood.

The light was that of a burning building, and, from her station at the window, Ruth had no difficulty in discovering that the parsonage was on fire.

She flew down the stairs, and hurried through the fields that lay between her cottage and the church-yard. She thought that perhaps she could aid in saving some of the furniture from destruction. To her surprise, she found not the usual crowd gathered to witness the conflagration, for every one who was not languishing on a bed of sickness, was thoroughly worn out with attendance on others; and at this hour of the night probably the entire neighborhood was wrapped in sleep.

The fire had not yet taken hold of the main building, but was confined to a back wing used as a store-house and kitchen. Ruth tried the front door, but it was fastened on the inside, and then she was sure that the inmates had not escaped.

With a shudder she remembered that Mr. Rutherford had not slept for four nights, and consequently, in the depth of his weariness, the roar of the flames had failed to awaken him. And Mrs. Rutherford and the servant-girl, where were they? Undoubtedly in the burning house, and unless speedily aroused, doomed to a fearful and inevitable death.

The flames had made rapid headway, and were now seizing on the roof of the principal building. A few moments more and it would be too late! Some of the neighbors had now arrived, and eagerly the cry for Mr. Rutherford and his family ran around the circle. For reply, Ruth pointed to the house.

A murmur of dismay broke on the air, for all saw the hopelessness of finding any one with sufficient courage to dare the entrance of that blazing building.

"Not escaped! Good God! then they must perish!" cried a white-haired old man. "No human being could live long in such a smoke as that!" he pointed to the roof from whence a volley of smoke was issuing.

"I must go for them," said Ruth. "I can not stand by and see them perish!"

A score of arms were raised to stay her course, but she sprang clear of them all, and dashing open the low window leading into the little sitting-room, she stepped inside. The apartment, though untouched by the fire, was filled with the stifling stench of smoke, and the crackling of the flames in the next room would have dismayed any heart not nerved with superior courage. Up the broad stairs flew the daring girl, and along the corridor to the chamber door of Mrs. Rutherford. The portal was thrown open from within, and the old lady, pale but calm, met her on the threshold.

"Your son? where is he?" Ruth asked the question quickly, impatient of a second's delay.

"Yonder! I was going to call him;" she indicated a distant door, where the flames were sweeping down hotly from the ceiling, and the red cinders fell in a thick cloud.

Ruth bounded along the passage, and flung open the door of the chamber. The fire scorched her hair, and the heat of the floor burned her feet, but she did not hesitate.

Mr. Rutherford lay on the bed, wrapped in a dressing-gown and sleeping quietly as an infant, all unmindful of the peril which surrounded him.

Ruth grasped his shoulder, and shook him violently.

"Wake up! Wake up!" she cried. "Follow me—the house is on fire!"

He sprang to his feet, and gazed around him with blank amazement.

"You here, dear Ruth! Leave me instantly! I will come—but stay, where is my mother and Katharine?"

"Your mother is in safety by this time, but Katharine—I had forgotten her."

"Go, then, this moment! I will arouse the girl. Go, dear one, and God keep you!"

They left the room together, and together they met the fiery billow of flame that surged down to meet them. Grasping Ruth's hand firmly in his own, the young minister hurried on to the chamber where the servant-girl slept. He pushed open the door—Katharine lay in a swoon

in the center of the floor—the fright had been too much for her. Rutherford raised her up.

"Go before me down the stairs Ruth," he said; "I must save this poor creature, at all hazards."

The trembling girl obeyed him, and they made the descent in safety. But not a moment too soon! With a loud crash, the stairway fell in, and the burning rafters of the roof covered their retreat with a sea of fire.

The outer air was reached at last, and scorched and faint, Ruth Mowbray sunk down at the feet of Mrs. Rutherford.

A moment more, and the once pleasant parsonage lay upon the ground, a heap of blazing timbers, and a pyre of crimson light!

The houseless family went home with Ruth, where they remained until mid-winter, when a new home was made ready for them on the site of the old one.

And not long after their removal, John Rutherford, sitting by the side of his fair preserver, asked her to put her hand in his, and walk with him through life. Her head sunk to rest on his shoulder—she was glad to lay it there; and she did not resist the gentle arm that drew her close to his strong, true heart.

Both had loved before; both had suffered; both had come forth purified.

"I have waited long for this hour, dear Ruth," said the young man. "I yearned to ask you this question months ago, but I wanted to wait until time should heal the wound your olden disappointment had left. The tender vine torn from one resting-place must have sunshine and rain before it will cling to another support; its severed tendrils must have time to grow again."

It was very sweet to hear his voice speaking thus to her; to feel his cherishing arm around her, and know that out of all the world there was one to whose existence she was necessary.

And John Rutherford, when he kissed her brow at parting, in the pale moonlight, thought he had never seen so beautiful a being, save in his dreams of Heaven.

CHAPTER XI.

MY LADY.

Gentle, and lovely, and high-born was she—
—ALANSON.

THE pastor of Windfall was standing before his cottage-door, when a Boston coach stopped at the gate, and a stranger inquired if Ruth Mowbray resided in the neighborhood.

"Ruth Mowbray? yes, sir—yonder is her home."

"Thank you, sir; and if you are a friend of hers, you will rejoice at hearing of her good fortune. Ruth Mowbray is Ruth Mowbray no longer, but Lady Ruth Manchester, the heiress of one of the finest estates in England. To communicate this intelligence I am seeking her. Good-morning, sir."

Ruth Mowbray no longer! but Lady Ruth Manchester! Mr. Rutherford said the words over again and again, as a deep shade of sadness settled on his usually placid brow. A titled heiress! what would she care for the love of a poor and humble clergyman? would she renounce the pomp and pageantry which awaited her beyond the sea, to share his lowly lot, and reign in his lowly heart?

In spite of faith, doubt came upon him. He entered his chamber, closed and locked the door, and on his knees supplicated for strength to bear whatever might be in store for him.

"She always was beautiful—now, she is rich and titled—yet why should I murmur? If this blackness of desolation should fall on my life, I can only cling closer to the God of goodness, who never willingly afflicts. I will trust!"

He felt soothed and strengthened; and, believing that all would be ordered for the best, he went cheerfully about his daily duties. His mother saw the struggle in his feelings, but she forbore her sympathy—save by the prayer which she sent to Heaven, that this cup might pass from him.

Of course Windfall was alive with the news. Lord Henry Dorset had died without heirs; and Mrs. Mowbray had been his only sister; consequently, to her child, as next of kin, descended the property of the Earl—amounting to eighty thousand pounds sterling—together with the title of Lady Manchester.

There was a younger niece of the dead peer who came in for a small annuity; for the rest, the quiet little dressmaker was its sole proprietress.

Mr. Montague, the agent of the late Lord Dorset, had come to convey the intelligence,

and to accompany the young heiress to England.

It was really astonishing to see how quickly people discovered the extraordinary virtues and graces of Ruth Mowbray. Her cottage was flocked with aristocratic visitors; each and all anxious to pay their respects to and congratulate Lady Manchester on her accession to her rightful honors. Presents were sent her by young ladies, who had hitherto treated her with contempt.

Isn't it strange how high a value we Americans, with all our boasted democracy, set on the patent of nobility? If a coronet is a passport to English favor, it is doubly so to the good graces of the citizens of these United States. After all, most of us have a secret reverence for the power of royalty, and a private hankering after the honors of nobility.

Young Eugene Thornbury, the village aristocrat *par excellence*, did himself the honor to call immediately on the young heiress, for the purpose of expressing the high respect and esteem in which he had always held Miss Mowbray—he begged pardon—Lady Manchester. And though Ruth well knew that a week previously he would have considered himself disgraced by speaking to her, she treated him with the kindness and courtesy which she had ever displayed toward all.

The ensuing day the squire repeated his call, this time to bring a bouquet of flowers sent by his lady mother, and to entreat Lady Manchester to take tea at the Hall the next evening. But Lady Manchester was otherwise engaged, and regretted the necessity of being obliged to decline the invitation. And again, on the third day, Squire Thornbury called, and before he left, he laid his hand and fortune at the feet of the *quondam* milliner. His life would be wretched and miserable without her, he said; his sun would go down while it was yet day, if she refused to go with him down the valley of life. But in spite of his eloquence, Ruth felt herself compelled to doom him to perpetual sunset, and he went out from her presence broken in pride and humbled in heart.

To no one did Ruth see fit to give her confidence. Windfall, with all its gossips, could not ascertain whether she intended to remove to England, and assume her rights and honors, or whether she would remain where she was, content with being the queen of the village. Great anxiety was felt on this score; envious maidens heartily wished her beyond the Atlantic; for their particular favorites among the young men had suddenly become aware of the fact that Ruth was the fairest and most winning damsel in the village, and how it would end no one knew. Mr. Montague, the agent, had quarters in Boston, and when questioned regarding Lady Manchester's intentions, was particularly close-mouthed on the subject. Curiosity, for once, was baffled. As for John Rutherford, he held aloof. He would not influence the girl, he said; he would not hold her unwillingly to her engagement with him, though his heart should break in giving her liberty.

Four days rolled by, and still there came to him no message from the young heiress; and rumor said that on the *fifth* she would sail for England. Rutherford, stern and unmoved, heard the tidings, and still went not near her.

CHAPTER XII.

THE BREAD OF LABOR.

There's a divinity that shapes our ends,
Rough hew them as we will.

—SHAKESPEARE.

MRS. WINTHROP had heard enough, vague though it was, to make her shudder at the very thought of remaining another day with the man whom the law had made her husband.

Willie was dead—the only link that bound her to Mr. Winthrop was severed; and now that she knew Milford Winthrop to be the vilest thing on earth, she was resolved to endure her martyrdom no longer.

She breathed not a word of what she had heard; she made her preparations with silence and dispatch. Her trunks were yet in the depot at Boston; and she had only to arrange the deep mourning dress which she proposed to wear henceforth.

Her jewels, to the value of several thousand dollars, she sealed up and forwarded to an old and tried friend of her father's in Roxbury, with instructions to keep them until she should reclaim them.

She had by her about one thousand dollars, and with this she thought to go South and establish a school for young ladies. Her property she still held in her own right, and there

was no necessity of her laboring for a living; but employment for the mind she must have. Sad reflections overpowered her when she sat down to idleness, and she had heard it said that the bread which is bought by toil is sweet.

She passed the night—the dim, misty night—upon the grave of her child; it was the last tribute she could pay. Early in the morning she arose from the chill turf, and bade this tomb of her love a long farewell. Two hours later she was in Boston. Reclaiming her trunks, she changed their labels, and as the property of Mrs. Lucy Bell, they were put on the train for New York. She followed them, and that night she slept in the great metropolis.

Mr. Winthrop was absent on business, and would not discover her flight until pursuit would be useless, for she had left no clew by which she might be traced.

She had fixed on South Carolina as her place of refuge. She would be least likely to be sought in that direction, and would be by no means likely to meet any one from the North in that State, who had known her in happier days. Besides, she had heard much in praise of the genial climate of the Carolinas, and her health was none of the strongest.

Mrs. Bell—as we must now, for a time at least, denominate Winifred—hurried on from New York to Charleston, by the steamer. The voyage was unusually long, and the weather boisterous; but at last the spires of Charleston burst into view, and the steamer drew up to the crowded wharf. The busy, bustling scene of confusion for a moment made Mrs. Bell's head turn giddy; she was unused to making her way through such a multitude alone and unprotected; but gathering strength from her very weakness, she stepped on shore and gave her baggage into the guardianship of an officious hackman. He inquired whither she would be driven—she said to some quiet, respectable hotel.

Arrived at an unpretending house in a retired street, the coachman handed her out, and demanded two dollars for his fee. She put her hand in her pocket for her purse—it was not there! In the crowd at the quay she had been robbed!

She explained the matter to the man, who immediately changed his respectful air to the most insolent abuse, which he delivered in broken English and bad French.

"Madam can say what she likes—*n'importe!* I s'all have *de l'argent, ou je ne vous donnez pas vos coffres!*"

"Very well," she returned; "you can retain the trunks; no doubt but you will find in them amply sufficient to pay you for your trouble."

"Madam is one *trompeur*; I no s'all have no tricks played on me!"

She drew from her finger a ring of exquisite workmanship, set with a single topaz.

"Take this and give me my trunks. Take it; it would purchase your whole establishment!"

"Non! Non! Pierre Le Couvre is no fool. He has seen *tout le monde*. You is one sheat, I does t'ink!"

"And I think a wholesome *coup de pied a derriere* would benefit you and teach you a lesson," cried a young man who had paused near and listened to the colloquy—"so there—"

He flung the little Frenchman a two-dollar note, and at the same time gave him a kick which sent him tumbling down the steps into the gutter—muttering as he went—

"Sac-r-r-r-e!" with a true Gallic roll of the r.

The young man turned to Mrs. Bell.

"Madam, in what manner can I serve you?" he asked, courteously.

He had removed his hat, leaving his forehead bare. She looked attentively into his face, and saw nothing there but manly truth and nobility.

"Sir," said she, "I thank you for the service you have already done me. I am a Northerner, desirous of getting employment as a teacher. I had thought of a school in a small way, but as some one has abstracted my funds, I shall be content—nay glad—of a place as governess in some private family."

A flush of intelligence passed over the young man's features. He took a few moments for consideration. At length he said:

"I came to this place partly to procure an instructress for my young sisters, whom my mother is unwilling to send away from home; I have been disappointed in the person I had expected to engage; but I hardly regret it, if we can make a bargain to put you in her place."

Mr. Vernon—so the stranger introduced himself—conducted the lady into a parlor of the hotel, and a regular business interview took place between them. The result was favorable

to both. Mrs. Bell was engaged at a liberal salary; and before noon of that day she was on her way with her employer to his plantation—"Castle Hill"—several miles above Columbia, on the Wateree river.

At sunset of the third day the travelers reached their destination, and Mrs. Bell was at once made one of the family.

The master of the place was her kind acquaintance of three days—Horace Vernon, whom the early death of his father had left in charge of the family and estates. Mrs. Vernon was still young, handsome and thrifty—a fair type of a Southern housewife.

There were two little fair-faced girls—Horace's sisters—Alice and Mildred; and when the governess saw them, the memory of her own darling, lying dead and cold in his seaside grave, came over her, and bursting into tears she left the room.

Mrs. Vernon understood at once that some great grief troubled the heart of the stranger, and with true delicacy she forbore to question her. Mrs. Bell would do best without that sympathy which must seem obtrusive, she said; and so she evinced no curiosity, but treated the governess with a kind, motherly attention, very pleasant to the recipient.

But before Mrs. Bell had been two months at Castle Hill, its young master would have given all that he possessed for the power to comfort her in her secret grief. He would have suffered unutterable anguish but to have known that his voice and his presence, brought happiness to the soul of the beautiful woman!

But he held his peace; some strange influence kept him silent; and the young teacher found in him only the tenderness and fond care of an affectionate brother.

Mrs. Bell's life at Castle Hill was calm and pleasant. Mrs. Vernon was like a dear mother to her; and the children loved her so dearly that they were ever ready to render the most implicit obedience to her wishes. Every night, when she knelt in prayer, she thanked God that he had cast her lines in such pleasant places.

The Vernons had taken it for granted that their governess was a widow, and she was willing that the illusion should continue. She never alluded, in any manner, to her past life; and they came to suppose that she had married unhappily, and perhaps against the wishes of her friends, and therefore avoided the theme.

Had Mrs. Bell lived more in the present, and less in the past, she could not have failed to discover the infatuation of Horace Vernon.

His every thought seemed a study as to how he could best contribute to her pleasure.

He brought her the freshest fruits and flowers, the choicest books and sweetest songs. He was sad when she was sad; if, for a moment, she forgot herself, and indulged the natural buoyancy of her disposition, he was a new creature—so readily did he catch the tone of her spirits.

He exerted his rare conversational powers continually to amuse her, and her slightest wish was the law by which he was guided.

CHAPTER XIII.

AN UNEXPECTED JOURNEY AND UNEXPECTED EVENTS.

"Love! I scorn the word! I know it not!
I listen only to the voice that bids me on!
On, whether I will, or no; the stern, cold voice
Of duty!"

OUR heroine had been at Castle Hill fifteen months, and never a word of Mr. Winthrop had reached her, save occasional allusions in the newspaper to his career at Washington.

She was sitting at her sewing, in the parlor, one cold morning in February, when Horace Vernon came in with the week's mail. While he was examining his letters, she took up the brown bundles he had thrown into her lap—the family newspapers—and tore off the wrapper of the first one that offered. Glancing listlessly over the damp sheet, her eye was caught by the following paragraph:

"TERRIBLE AFFAIR AT THE CAPITAL!"

"We learn from the Washington Globe of the 30th ult., that a duel has taken place between Senator Winthrop, of Massachusetts, and Brandon Lawrence, Esq., of Virginia, which resulted in serious, if not fatal injury to the former. It is thought by the attending physicians that Mr. Winthrop will not survive his wounds, though he may, possibly, live for some weeks longer. He has been removed from his hotel to a private house in Alexandria, where he will be carefully attended to. It is said that the meeting between the two gentlemen was caused by some family affairs, which have not yet transpired, and with which we, at present, are not conversant."

There followed a long tirade against the practice of dueling; a bitter editorial on the magni-

tude of that man's crime who stands up coolly to shoot down his fellow-man—but Mrs. Bell read no further. She put down the paper, and left the room. Up to her chamber she went, and passed an hour in silent, though troubled thought. At the end of that time, she arose—her course of action was determined upon.

The path of duty lay clear and plain before her! The man whom she had promised to honor, obey and cherish, in sickness as well as in health, lay, perhaps, at the point of death, with no kindred hand to smooth his pillow, or wipe the clammy sweats from his brow. He was stricken down in his manhood—stricken by his own graceless act—the victim of a false code of honor—the outcast of good men—the companion of the blood-stained. She felt no regard for Milford Winthrop; yet she would go to him now, in his dire extremity!

She hastily packed a few articles of necessary clothing in a basket; attired herself for traveling, and descended to the parlor, where Mrs. Vernon and her son were sitting. Her hand trembled as she entered the presence of those good friends, for a moment she was tempted to throw herself on their friendship and give them her entire confidence, but she resisted the impulse, and in a few brief words informed them that a circumstance had occurred which rendered it necessary for her to go north for a while. She regretted, she said, while she could not obviate the necessity; and would, if Providence permitted, return to Castle Hill, and fulfill her engagement. Mrs. Vernon was surprised and pained. It was so sudden—could not Mrs. Bell defer the journey for a few days? No, the governess said—every moment's delay was an agony to her; she must set off immediately.

Well, Mrs. Vernon said, if she must leave them, she could only speed her on her way by placing no obstacles before her, and by wishing her a prosperous journey, and an early return. Horace said nothing, though his handsome face clouded at the announcement of his favorite's intended departure, and when she left the room, he followed her out into the hall.

"Must you go, Lucy? Can not you write or send some one in your stead?" he asked, anxiously.

"I, only, can attend to this call, Mr. Vernon. It is a duty—a sacred duty!"

"May I inquire how far north this business will take you?"

She hesitated, but at length replied—"Some distance north of Richmond, in Virginia."

"So far! and you think to go alone? It must not be! I object to it, most decidedly!"

"Thank you for your interest—but there is no need of apprehension. I shall be entirely safe, and—"

"Mrs. Bell," he said, with decision, "you have been under my roof nearly fifteen months, and have I ever in that time given you reason to doubt me?"

"No! never!" she returned, warmly.

"Well, then, I am going to accompany you a part of your way: you, yourself, shall set the limit if it be a reasonable one. I do not wish to pry into your affairs; I do not seek to know what calls you away from us—I trust you in that, for you can do no evil! But you shall not undertake all that long journey alone! So, consider it settled that I am to go with you."

She was in too much haste to set out to argue with him, and so he had it all his own way. Mrs. Vernon approved her son's plan heartily; kissed both the travelers cordially; wished them God speed, and sent them away. Two days' constant traveling by rail brought them within the borders of Virginia, and here Mrs. Bell entreated her escort to leave her. But he refused, and they went on together, to Fredericksburg. She would permit him to go no further, and Horace, seeing her evident distress at his persistence, forbore to urge his company upon her.

The next day Mrs. Bell reached Washington city, and at early twilight she stood beside the bed of Milford Winthrop.

CHAPTER XIV.

CONFESSION.

By each spot the most unholy,
In each nook most melancholy—
There the traveler meets, aghast,
Sheeted memories of the past!

—EDGAR A. POE.

MR. WINTHROP'S greeting to his wife partook of shame, surprise and pleasure. His intense suffering required the constant care of a nurse, and there was no hand so soft as Winifred's; no voice so sweet and soothing.

All other attendants were dismissed from the chamber, and his wife took the sole charge—he was grateful and penitent. If she quitted his presence, only for a moment, he was restless and uneasy until her return.

Moreover, he wished to confess to some one the many sins that lay in such a burden on his conscience; and to whom could he humble himself so well as to his much-wronged wife?

He knew that the sands of his life were falling away—in a little while the glass would be empty; and, in view of the great change that was coming upon him, Milford Winthrop grew humble and remorseful.

Winifred tended him with the utmost patience and gentleness. She hated him no longer; his very helplessness disarmed all feelings but those of compassion. He lay there weak, repentant and dying—the man who had darkened the best years of her life—and for the sake of his suffering, and remembering that as he was now lying at death's door, so she must one day lie, she forgave him for the cunning art with which he had influenced her father to require her to marry him.

At intervals, as his distress would permit, Mr. Winthrop made Winifred acquainted with the history of his life. The details were given in broken sentences, and in parts, accompanied with bitter repinings; so we connect and condense the essential portions of his relation, for the convenience of the reader.

Milford Winthrop was born in the State of New York, of wealthy parents, and early destined by his proud father for the bar. He was an only son, and the probable heir of a large fortune. At the age of nineteen, he came forth from the halls of New Haven university, a graduate; but, before he commenced the study of his profession, he indulged in two years of travel. He visited the principal points of interest in Europe; returned, a gay, dissolute young aristocrat, to the States, and set off on a Southern tour.

At college, he had become very intimate with a young Virginian, named Brandon Lawrence, and by invitation of this friend, his visit South was made. Lawrence resided in the western part of the Old Dominion, on a fine swell of land, which rose higher and higher at the north until it joined the Blue Ridge. It was a capital place for hunting and fishing, and Lawrence being an orphan, with no relatives in the house, save a maiden aunt who had the supervision of the servants, there was nothing to hinder the young men from enjoying themselves continually in out-of-door sports.

Milford, as we have said, was rather a wild youth, and this kind of life suited him exactly. Lawrence was a noble-hearted young fellow, with a fine flow of spirits, and willing to do any thing to promote the enjoyment of his guest.

But a change came, and the *confreres* were obliged to quit their pioneer sort of life. Lawrence's cousin, Melicent Brandon, a fair, beautiful girl of seventeen, came for a visit to her aunt and cousin. Unlucky hour!

Besides her personal attractions, Melicent was possessed of some fortune. She was the promised bride of young Lawrence. He loved her truly and tenderly, with the whole strength of his fervid Southern nature, and she professed to return his affection. But the handsome face of Mr. Winthrop, and his stylish, fascinating manners, attracted the somewhat coquettish girl, and she grew cold and distant toward her cousin. Winthrop was not slow to follow up his advantage. Melicent was handsome, of an old family, and she was an heiress; he admired her beauty, coveted her fortune. He basely betrayed the confidence of his friend; proposing an elopement to the giddy girl—and thus consummated his villainy.

The erring couple left the house at night, proceeded to a small village some six miles distant, where they were united, and returned to the mansion of the outraged lover before breakfast.

As a matter of course, they were indifferently received. The bride was sent home to her parents at Bellemonte; and young Lawrence and the bridegroom met in a duel, which resulted in a wound to the former that kept him confined to his bed for two months.

The parents of Melicent were almost heart-broken at the conduct of their daughter. Melicent had been their idol—the shrine about which the tenderest affections of their hearts clung, and the rending of the chords of confidence and love was very bitter.

The match between her and her cousin had been long settled, and this rude sundering of the engagement brought reproach and scandal upon

the hitherto unsullied name of Brandon. Winthrop cared nothing for this; his very recklessness increased the distress of the aged parents of his wife.

Mr. Brandon fell into a decline. His naturally feeble constitution was broken by the recent stroke—ere long, death released him. His wife, completely prostrated by the loss of her husband, sunk into a rapid consumption, and survived him only a few short months.

Thus the whole Brandon property fell into the hands of Milford Winthrop.

As for Mr. Lawrence, immediately on his recovery from his wound, he sold his Virginian possessions, discharged his liabilities, and, broken in health, spirits and fortune, left the country. Whither he went no one knew.

Young Winthrop, by this time, wearied of his pretty, capricious wife; and her wild grief for the loss of her parents, mingled, as it was, with bitter self-reproach, filled him with intense dissatisfaction. He hated to see a woman forever in tears, he said; he wanted a wife to cheer him and make him happy, not a blubbing Niobe. In consequence, poor Melicent was treated with harshness, and often with cruelty.

This conduct of her husband was not without its effect on the wretched girl. Her mind, never of the strongest type, became filled with one idea, upon which she dwelt day and night—*hatred for Milford Winthrop.*

Her love had undergone a gradual but sure transformation; and now she adored him as cordially as she had once loved. This hatred with her took the form of a fearful monomania. She imagined that if she could deprive her husband of life, she would be doing the world an immeasurable service; and thrice she had made attempts to murder him.

He placed her in close confinement, and allowed no one to visit her room but himself. He seemed to take a sort of fiendish delight in her helplessness, and in taunting her with her impotence to do him harm. But he was not so secure from her as he thought. He awoke one night to find her standing over him with a huge butcher knife, just ready to strike it to his heart. He dashed it aside, and succeeded in capturing her, but not until she had wounded him severely with a pair of scissors which were fastened to her girdle.

After this occurrence, Winthrop felt himself justified in deserting her. However, he did not leave her alone. He placed her in the care of a servant after his own heart, and himself set out for the East, where he readily obtained a decree of divorce from his wife, on the ground of her insanity. By the decree he was appointed guardian of the unfortunate woman.

The property, of course, saving enough for her maintenance, belonged to him according to the statute provided for such cases. After obtaining the divorce, he returned to Bellemonte, disposed of all the Brandon heritage (except the old homestead), including lands, stock and slaves.

Bellemonte he retained; and, having purchased four negroes from Louisiana, he put them there in charge of his divorced wife. He declared her a maniac—though, undoubtedly, she was sane save in her great hatred of him—and had her confined to the green room, with which the reader is already acquainted. The heavily-barred windows prevented her escape in that way; and the baize upon the walls was to hinder the transmission of sound, in case any stranger should be within the grounds, and the captive should cry out.

He feed the slaves who guarded her, liberally, thus keeping them true to his interests, and, with the money obtained from the sale of his wife's patrimony, he proceeded to Massachusetts, and purchased Maplewood.

His father's death, occurring about this time, put him in possession of a princely revenue; and soon after, having studied law at each leisure moment since his departure from college, he commenced the practice of his profession in Boston.

Occasionally he visited Virginia to see that his wretched victim was not let loose. With the lapse of years, Melicent's malady increased, and she became periodically insane in reality. Still, she had lucid intervals, in which her cries for release were heart-rending.

Mr. Winthrop had been in business several years when he first met Winifred Atherton. The girl's beauty pleased him, and her father's wealth was agreeable to his inordinate love of gold. By a crafty appearance of virtue, and many a well-timed act of kindness, he led the unsuspecting old man to place in him unlimited confidence. The result of his scheming is already known.

When Mrs. Winthrop had wished to leave Washington for some country retreat, and by a singular coincidence, had fixed upon Rappahannock county—the scene of her husband's villainy—he had opposed her plan, because she would be brought into the vicinity of his first wife's prison-house. But, on second thought, he feared to persist in his objections, lest Winifred should suspect him of some hidden motive, and institute investigations which might lead to an exposure of the whole affair.

Therefore he had made a journey into western Virginia, and removed Melicent to an old hunting-lodge on the other side of the mountains, some three or four miles from Woodstock. There he left her in care of two of his younger slaves, giving them strict directions not to allow her to quit her room on the peril of their lives.

Melicent was possessed of exceeding artfulness, and no small degree of craft. The negroes, believing her too thoroughly insane to heed or comprehend their conversation, had no scruple in discussing freely their master's affairs in her presence, and through their idle gossip she learned the whole particulars of the expected arrival at Bellmonte, and the preparations which were making.

With infinite joy she found that the chamber which was to be appropriated to Mrs. Winthrop was the room which Mr. Brandon, her late father, had used for a cabinet; and behind the chimney of which there was a sliding panel, close down to the floor, that shut up a roomy recess, used by the former master of Bellemonte as a sort of safe for papers of value. This recess communicated with a narrow passage leading under the north wing of the mansion, and terminating in an outlet in the open air which was closed by a movable stone.

Melicent knew this secret, but she had never divulged it to any one; and when she understood that the wife and child of her enemy were to be domiciled in that chamber, she swore in her soul a terrible oath to take the lives of both.

This would be a glorious revenge on her traitor husband, and she would give herself no rest until she found means to accomplish it. But how was she to elude the vigilance of her keepers? Once clear of her prison she saw no obstacle to her purpose; but how was she to obtain her liberty? A thought struck her, which she caught at with lightning-like quickness.

She was subject to fits, during which the whole house would ring with her agonized shrieks; and for some time her attendants had been in the habit of quieting her with inhalations of ether. If she could but turn the tables upon them! The powerful drug once in her possession, and she would defy a whole army to keep her imprisoned.

To this end she complained of an excessive headache, and prayed that camphor might be brought, hoping that Chloe would fetch the medicine-basket also. But in this latter expectation she was disappointed. The girl gave her the camphor, and Melicent submerged her head in the liquid—using a great deal of it, and spilling a great deal more. She emptied the bottle, at last, and concealed it in her clothing, and when Chloe asked for it she said that she had thrown it out of the window.

Directly afterward, this cunning woman feigned a nervous spasm, and made the whole place hideous with her yells. Chloe rushed in with the ether, but Melicent cried out piteously:

"Brandy and water! a drop! for the love of heaven!"

She was accustomed to take this mixture as a stimulant, and the terrified slave unthinkingly set the ether on the floor, and flew down-stairs for the brandy. Quick as thought Melicent caught up the bed-quilt to her mouth and nose with one hand, and with the other transferred the ether into the bottle which had contained the camphor. Hiding this in her bosom, she filled the other jar with water from her jug, and just as she had completed this dextrous operation, Chloe re-entered. Of course the negress was in the maniac's power; and while Chloe stooped over her to administer the stimulant, Melicent dashed a part of the ether full into her nostrils.

The girl fell to the floor like lead, and Melicent fled from the room, closing and bolting the door upon her luckless captive. In the buttery she met the negro man, and without ceremony treated him to the remainder of the ether, which stupefied him in an instant. She dragged him into a bedroom near by, and having fastened the door, she secured the carving-knife from the kitchen, and set off for Bellemonte.

It was night, but she knew the way well—every spot in the vicinity was familiar to her, for it was the haunt of her happy childhood.

Like a wild deer she flew on, and reached the mouth of the secret passage without molestation. The great stone swung back at her touch on the hidden spring, and gave her ready ingress to the passage. She ascended to the recess, and, removing the sliding panel, gained Winifred's chamber. Mother and child were both sleeping, and both would have fallen a sacrifice to the rage of the demon but for Winifred's sudden and providential awakening. Once again, on a succeeding night, was her design frustrated in the same manner.

The third time she had been partially successful. The presence of Rosy had prevented her from murdering the mistress; so she contented herself with stealing little Willie.

The child she proposed to carry to the lodge, and kill it at her leisure; but the poor innocent's cries for its mother were so piteous, and its struggling rendered it such a burden, that her patience gave out. She strangled it, and left it dead on the banks of the river, where the unhappy father had subsequently discovered the remains.

Melicent succeeded in reaching the lodge without discovery, and then, with a singularity that went far to establish the fact of her insanity, she released the two negroes, whom she had constantly fed during their incarceration, told them what she had done, and gave herself up to them at once.

The extraordinary exertions which she had made, and the exposure that she had undergone, threw the miserable woman into a raging fever, which lasted three weeks.

At the expiration of that time her disease took a favorable turn, and for more than a month it was expected that she would ultimately recover. But a relapse occurred, and her fate was decided.

Mr. Winthrop arrived at the lodge the day preceding her death, and his threats wrung from the dying woman a minute confession of her sin. She revealed all, unreservedly; and with the last words trembling on her lips, she expired.

Mr. Winthrop saw her decently interred by the side of her parents, gave the negroes who had served him so faithfully their freedom, shut up Bellemonte, and returned to Maplewood, to find his home desolate.

He remembered Winifred's words at the time he had brought home the dead child, and he had little hesitation in believing that she had fulfilled her threat, and would return to him no more. Suspecting, also, that she had heard rumors of his baseness, he had double reason to believe that it would be useless to prolong his stay at Maplewood in expectation of her appearance; and leaving the house in charge of his servants, he returned to Washington without seeking for her retreat.

Three weeks before the fatal duel, Brandon Lawrence, the cousin of Melicent, had arrived in America. An accidental meeting had taken place at Washington between the former friends, and some taunting words were exchanged. Mr. Lawrence's hot blood was in no wise cooled by the lapse of time. He challenged Mr. Winthrop to mortal combat.

This was the substance of his confession. Winifred could only compassionate the poor, wasted piece of mortality before her, and commit him, with many prayers, to the mercy of God.

Mr. Winthrop grew worse. His wounds healed falsely—inflammation set in, and for six miserable days he suffered unspeakable agony.

With vain longings for a little more of the fever called life, and clinging closely to the hand of his wife as though she could keep him back, the spirit of Milford Winthrop passed unto the bar of its Judge.

CHAPTER XV.

THE PAINS OF SICKNESS.

Though griefs unnumbered throng thee round,
Still in thy God confide!

Whose finger marks the seas their bound
And curbs the headlong tide.—MERRICK.

WINIFRED accompanied the remains of her husband, in their splendid coffin, to the burial-place at Maplewood. It was duty that she owed to the cold form beneath those rich rose-wood carvings, and she would not shrink from it.

Directly after the performance of the pompous funeral rites, the will of the deceased was read—the will which had been drawn up while the testator lay on his death-bed—and it was found that his wife, Winifred Winthrop, was made sole heir of all the rich man's possessions.

The widow remained a few days at Maple-

wood, to weep over the grave of her little Willie, and then she set out for Atherton Hall. The old servants there received her with wild demonstrations of joy, and again she roamed through the spacious rooms, and indulged in melancholy reveries of the sweet, dim past.

Every tree and shrub—every flower and tuft of grass, was a dear *souvenir*—a link between the *now* and *then*; a tender reminder of the happy life which was gone forever!

She visited the tomb of her parents, at Mount Auburn, and plucked from the green inclosure the first blue violet of spring.

Then, bidding farewell to the faithful domestics at Atherton Hall, she returned to Boston, where she placed the complicated affairs of her late husband in the hands of an eminent lawyer for settlement, and herself sojourning for a few days with her old friend, Mrs. Marchmont. This good lady was exceedingly anxious to keep Winifred with her permanently, and used every argument to that effect, but Winifred, while she felt deeply her kindness, considered herself bound to return to Castle Hill, and fulfill her engagement.

Sometimes she thought she would write, and, explaining the turn affairs had taken, ask to be excused from performing her agreement. But she owed the Vernons much for their kindness to her, and she would go back, if only to testify her gratitude.

And so, one bright April morning, she set forth on her return to Castle Hill. It was the middle of the month when she reached Columbia—wet, rainy, and extremely muddy.

She took a stage-coach to a little village some ten miles from Castle Hill, and owing to the wretched state of the roads, washed by recent heavy rains, her progress was exceedingly slow.

There was a poor woman, with a blue-eyed little girl passenger in the coach, and the child seemed suffering with some unknown disease. Winifred, compassionating the stranger, sought her acquaintance, and divided with her the task of holding the child. The mother thought it had the measles, as it had been exposed to them, and the skin had something of that appearance.

About half-way to the village before mentioned, the woman and child left the coach—the latter being unable to ride further. Winifred performed the remainder of the journey, which occupied a week, alone. Arrived at the terminus of her stage journey, she rested two days at the hotel, and then engaged a private conveyance to take her to Castle Hill.

During the last few days, a strange languor of spirits, and lassitude of body, had oppressed her; and now her temples throbbed hotly with a raging headache.

The jolting of the carriage increased the pain almost beyond endurance, and she feared that her strength would not sustain her throughout the transit. She became incredibly anxious to get on—the horses went at a snail's pace, and the bold swell of Castle Hill was so long in breaking on her view!

From the parlor windows, Horace Vernon saw the approaching carriage—his heart told him who was its occupant, and he hurried cut, bareheaded, into the driving rain to welcome her. Winifred had just strength enough to murmur:

"Take me to the house!" when she fell back unconscious, for the first time in her life.

Horace tore open the carriage door, and, clasping the inanimate form in his arms, bore her into the parlor, and laid her on a sofa by the fire. With all haste, he dispatched a servant for a physician, who was visiting their next neighbor, and in a few moments might be expected at Castle Hill.

With singular forethought, Horace did not arouse his mother, who was taking her afternoon nap in her chamber; and the children, who were spending the day with their aunt on the other side of the river, were not there to disturb the dear wanderer.

In a brief space, Dr. Urphan arrived. He examined the patient critically; made some singular inquiries, and shook his head.

"She has the snail-pox; of the most violent type, I should judge by the fever. I have seldom felt so high a pulse. She has a hard three weeks' work before her—poor girl!"

In this time of trial, Horace Vernon's strong decision of character led him to act quickly. He called his mother, gathered together her servants, and bade them prepare for an immediate journey. His mother objected to his plan—but he was firm, and in two hours from the time of Winifred's arrival, the entire household (with the exception of Horace and an old negress, who had had the disease) were on their

way to a small plantation belonging to the family, and situated six or seven miles further up the river.

Horace Vernon never felt a more intense thrill of satisfaction than at the moment when he knew that Winifred was to be his charge; that to him she was to owe all the careful tenderness that a sick one requires.

And never had a sufferer a more assiduous and gentle nurse. His whole life seemed bound up in the effort to make her comfortable. All that the tenderest and most thoughtful mother could have done for her sick child, he did for the helpless girl.

Her illness was long and tedious; she endured terrible spasms of pain—varied by seasons of lethargic slumber—or delirious raving—and from her unconscious revelations, Horace learned much of her past life. And the more he knew of her the dearer she became to him. He rarely left her; his sleep was taken in a chair by her bedside, during her rare intervals of painless rest; and every medicine passed through his hands before she swallowed it. There came, at length, a time when her life was despaired of!

The fearful disease had reached its crisis; the burning fever tugged desperately at the fountains of existence, and the live-long night Horace bent above her, in wild agony, asking God to spare her yet a little longer!

Toward morning there was a change—and the anxious physician, and the pale watcher, held their breath in suspense.

She lay perfectly motionless—white as the pillow—not a pulse fluttered, and the heaving of her breast in respiration was scarcely perceptible.

At sunrise she stirred slightly, and opening her eyes, she spoke the name of Horace Vernon.

A glad cry escaped the young man's lips—and as he bowed his head over her, his tears fell in a torrent on her face.

"I can not see you!" she said, in a troubled voice, "my eyes are so dim! But isn't it Horace Vernon?"

"Yes, dear one! it is none other! God be thanked! you are better!"

"Much better! The terrible pain has gone out of my temples, and I feel cool and calm. But my sight is so feeble! I have been very ill, haven't I?"

"Yes, dear; but don't talk about it, now."

"What has ailed me? It was something very strange! Don't refuse to tell me—I want to know!"

He hesitated. She went on, disregarding his admonition:

"Do not keep me in suspense. It is ten times worse than certainty. I can bear to know all, now."

"You have had the—the—varioid—small-pox, the Doctor seemed to think."

She lay quiet a moment, with closed eyes and slightly quivering lips. Then she spoke again:

"Am I very hideous?"

"Hideous! no, heaven be praised! There is nothing on your face, save pallor, to show that you have suffered!"

"God is good! very good—merciful and good!" she murmured, softly, clasping her hands.

"Yes, dearest, he is the very spirit of goodness."

She was quiet and silent for some time, during which her lips were eloquent in mental prayer. Then she asked:

"Where is your mother, and the dear children?"

"At the upper plantation, dear girl; all well and happy except for their anxiety on your account."

"Are you?"

"Was never in better health! and sweet content fills my breast to see you so much improved."

"I can rest now," she said, sweetly; and closing her eyes she lay still, murmuring at intervals, "Yes, God is good!"

When all danger from contagion was over, Mrs. Vernon and the family came back to Castle Hill, and Winifred was in great danger of being tended to death.

The children gave up all their sports, for fear of making her head ache; and Mrs. Vernon could never concoct any delicacy half good enough for her, in her own opinion.

As soon as Winifred was strong enough to talk, she confided her whole history to those excellent friends—keeping back only the portion relating to Gerard Middleton. That she could not bring herself to reveal.

And when she had finished, Horace Vernon longed inexpressibly to take the sweet hand to

his bosom, and kiss all tears from the pallid cheeks save those of joy.

To the surprise and infinite distress of her friends, Winifred's sense of vision continued to grow less and less, until, in a few weeks, total blindness came upon her!

Physicians, without number, were consulted—they all prophesied that return to health would restore the power of sight; but time passed, and brought no favorable issue.

Horace in a frenzy of doubt and apprehension, besought her to consent to a journey to Paris, where she might have the advice of eminent oculists, but she steadily refused. She felt, she said, that it would only be a useless attempt—and if hope was once reawakened, it would be doubly hard to crush it out again. And after a time he ceased to urge her.

It was a terrible trial to this proud, beautiful woman; but, in passing through the deep waters of affliction, she learned to put faith in the goodness of a gracious God. All pride, and scorn, and bitterness, went out from her heart—she became humble and trustful as a little child. It was good for her to be afflicted.

Her very helplessness endeared her a thousand-fold to Horace Vernon. It was his privilege to bear her about in his arms; to describe to her the sunset skies; paint to her blinded vision the glory of the summer landscape; to soothe and comfort her as a mother does her beloved child.

His happiest hours were spent with her when, leaning trustfully on his arm, together they took long walks in the glowing calms of evening, and sat down together on the grassy riverbanks. She was gentle, and quiet always; she said little by way of thanks—yet her lovely face and sightless eyes were eloquent of gratitude.

But it is a hard fate to be shut out forever from the beautiful things of earth! To be blind—groping in darkness—shrouded in a night which never breaks into morning!

God help thee, Winifred! It is hard for thee to realize it!

CHAPTER XVI.

A WOMAN'S TRUTH.

I fill this cup to one made up
Of loveliness alone;
A woman, of her gentle sex
The seeming paragon!
Her health! and would on earth there stood
Some more of such a frame!
That life might be all poetry,
And weariness a name."

—E. C. PINCKNEY.

BUT what of those other lovers whose fortunes we have thrust upon our readers?

The heart of the young pastor of Windfall grew heavy within him. His love as well as his inclination said to him:

"Go to Ruth Mowbray, tell her how strongly and tenderly you love her! Tell her that without her, life will be worse than a blank. Confess all to her, and perhaps her affection will be stronger than her pride."

But was it pride on the other hand that said:

"No; remain where you are. Let her choose for herself. You do not wish to take for a wife one who has a single thought or feeling reaching out after other shrines. Wait."

It was a beautiful September evening. The moon rose from out the bosom of a ridge of dense black clouds, and gave to the sable draperies of the east a silver fringe. The western heavens were clear, and gemmed with stars—there was no wind to stir the leaves with murmurous complaint; and Charles River gleamed like a polished crystal. The hum of the distant city had fallen to silence—men rested from their labors—sleep was upon the earth with her balm of rest—the universal heart of Nature was at peace.

But there was one who took no rest—one whose whole soul was in tumult.

Back and forth, in the shrubbery behind the church, walked John Rutherford; his face pale and stormy; his arms folded in the semblance of resignation upon a breast whose wild beating proclaimed no resignation within.

It was near midnight, he knew, for the clock on the neighboring steeple had just given the warning. He had hoped against hope for some message from little Ruth. The hope was dead now, and in its place had come despair.

It was midnight—the last night that the fair girl would spend in her native land. So report said, and why should he hesitate to believe it? Only a few more brief hours, and they would be irrevocably separated. The thought was maddening, and he struck his head violently with his clenched hand.

He would go into the house, he said—in where no human eye could witness his agony, he would go in and ask strength from the source from whence he never failed to receive it.

He turned to enter the house, where he might spend his night of sorrow alone. A hand was laid lightly on his arm. He stood face to face with Ruth Mowbray. The white moonlight shone full upon her brow; her deep, earnest eyes were lifted to his. There was no guile, no shrinking, in those calm, truthful orbs. He took both her hands in his, and said, simply:

"Well, Ruth, I have waited for you."

"And I could not stay away longer, John. I hoped you would come to me, but you did not; and now that I have come, you will not think me bold and forward?"

"No, Lady Ruth."

"Lady Ruth! never call me thus again! I renounce all claim to rank and title, John. There is but one earthly throne where I covet to reign!"

"And that is where?"

"In your heart!"

He caught her rapturously in his arms, weeping over her as we weep over those returned to us from the dead.

"My own little Ruth once more! God bless her true loyal heart! And she will not leave her humble lover for British titles and British gold!"

"Never, John; how could you think so?" she said, seriously and fervently.

There was childing in her tears, and perhaps he thought he deserved it, for he held her closer to his side. After a little while she went on:

"I have empowered Mr. Montague to dispose of all my new inheritance, and transmit to me the proceeds. We can do a great deal with that money, John. Providence has given it to us for that purpose. The title I relinquish to my young cousin across the seas, who has a handsome share of the heritage. I can afford to give up an empty name, when I have you and your love instead."

Think you John Rutherford was happy?

Two months later, there was a wedding in the little church of Windfall. The pale-browed young clergyman, and the blue-eyed milliner were made, before God, "one flesh."

People wondered, as people often will. Meddling ones censured Ruth for relinquishing her right to be called "my lady," and ambitious maidens wondered how she could bear to sell those fine old English castles, with their broad acres, without once seeing them. But Ruth regretted nothing. She was too happy for regrets—too full of peace to feel unrest.

The life of John Rutherford and his wife was blessed?

CHAPTER XVII.

DARKNESS AND DAWN.

"Darkened! this life, henceforth, a shadowy dream,
Blinded and helpless float I down the stream."

HORACE VERNON, in his noble, generous love, but yearned the more tenderly over Winifred on account of her blindness; he hungered to be to that shadowed life all in all—to place his sight, his reason, his existence—all that he had—at her service. And it was not long before he told her so.

He would make any sacrifice; wait any length of time; endure any degree of probation—if she would only give him one little ray of hope to cling to! He did not ask her to be his then—he would give her time—that she might learn to love him—learn to feel toward him the affection that would be to him the foretaste of Eden.

She listened to him quietly, but her beautiful face grew paler and sadder; she sorrowed over the pain she must inflict. She did not answer him directly, but spoke of her misfortune. She was helpless and blind, she said, of what value could her existence be to any one? She would only be a drawback, in which a husband could hope for neither pride nor pleasure. Vernon replied, passionately:

"Winifred, my love is the stronger on that account! for that my heart longs for you yet more tenderly and powerfully. You, blinded as you are, helpless as you would make me believe you, are more precious to me than all the women in the world! Winifred, my true love would be content to lead you through life always!"

She let him finish—then putting both her hands in his, she said:

"My dearest and best friend, in answer to what you ask, I must make a confession whose secrets have never before passed my lips. Since I was fifteen years of age, every thought, feeling and emotion of my heart has been bestowed

on one whose name my lips never speak! Him I love, entirely, wholly, and eternally! It is not probable that I shall ever meet him again in this life—I know not beneath what sky he is wandering—but in the land of everlasting peace we shall be reunited. In this hope alone do I live; and the thought of this meeting will make the way over Death's river look pleasant to me! Forgive me, Horace, but I can give you only a sister's love."

The young man's face underwent a change. His lips quivered, and great beads of perspiration stood upon his brow. There was a desperate struggle in his heart. But he triumphed over this emotion; he saw the mute distress of the blind lady, and he was generous enough to pity her rather than himself. He stooped over her and kissed her forehead.

"Winifred, forgive me; and hereafter look upon me as a brother, if I can be no more. I will accept, thankfully, the humblest place in your heart."

And she, grateful and happy for this new love, rested her head on his arm, and with her tears sealed the compact.

The country rung with the fame of the great French physician, Dr. Gerard. His name reached the secluded home of the Vernons, loaded with praise. He was a singularly successful oculist, who had performed some astonishing operations. Horace Vernon besought Winifred to make the journey to New York, and consult this great operator. Early in October she set forth for the metropolis, accompanied by Horace. They made their journey a long one, for Winifred was still feeble, but finally arrived at their destination.

Two days elapsed, during which Winifred rested from her fatigue, and Horace had an interview with Dr. Gerard. On the third day the fair patient, attended by her friend, was ushered into the doctor's presence.

Dr. Gerard was standing at a window, gazing out on the dense throng of life continually jostling down the street, when his visitors were announced. He turned quickly around to greet them, but he gave them no welcome; his eyes were riveted upon the sweet countenance of the lady, while slowly all the color went out from his face, leaving it white and clear as marble. He did not speak, he did not move; all the powers of his life seemed to be concentrated in that absorbing gaze.

Horace, in his anxiety, scarcely noticing the singular conduct of the physician, said:

"This is the lady whom I mentioned to you, yesterday."

Dr. Gerard, regaining self-control by an effort, came forward. He greeted Winifred in a few constrained, embarrassed words, and turned to Horace.

"The lady is your wife, I presume?" he said, in a constrained voice.

Horace blushed painfully.

"No, sir; not my wife, but my very dear friend."

A strange gleam of satisfaction shot athwart the dark, handsome face of the doctor. He took Winifred gently by the arm, and led her to an easy-chair in a shadowy corner of the room.

"Will you trust her with me a little while?" he asked, speaking to Horace.

"To be sure, if she consents."

"Certainly, Horace; I am not afraid," was her reply.

The soft tones of her voice seemed to strike some sensitive chord in the being of Dr. Gerard. His breast heaved, a tide of crimson surged up his cheek, his dark, passionate eyes took a depth of tenderness hardly compatible with the usual grave dignity for which he was distinguished.

He touched the white eyelids of the girl—a thrill ran through her; she opened wide those beautiful, sightless eyes, and leaned toward him, as if to understand what presence was near. He passed his hand soothingly over her hair, while an expression of unutterable tenderness dwelt on his face.

"Be quiet, madam; I will not be long."

How gentle he was! How very carefully he examined those shrinking eyes! How particular he was not to agitate her by word or motion!

At last—it seemed an age to the impatient waiter—he called Horace, and to his rapid inquiries replied, encouragingly:

"I can give you no certain grounds for hope, but I do not despair. To-morrow, if the lady has the courage, I can decide."

"In what manner?" cried Horace. "By an operation?"

"Yes, and by that only."

Horace shuddered.

"Will it be painful?"

"No, not if it should be in any manner successful. If the contrary—I will not deceive you—it will occasion some degree of suffering; perhaps more, perhaps less."

"Dear Winifred! my poor friend! Can you endure it?"

She smiled sweetly and hopefully.

"Yes, Horace, I can bear any thing better than suspense. Try me and see."

Dr. Gerard cast upon her a look of intense feeling, followed the visitors down the stairs, and to the door of their carriage.

"To-morrow, at ten," he said, by way of a reminder, as the carriage bore them away.

CHAPTER XVIII.

THE COMING OF LIGHT.

O'er the deep seas there is a calm,
Full as the hush of all Heaven's psalm!
Their golden goal—the victor palm!—MASSEY.

The hour arrived.

Winifred, pale but firm, sat in the operating chair, in the private surgery of Dr. Gerard. The place was cleared of all attendants. Not even Horace was allowed to remain.

The head of the patient was supported on the breast of the surgeon. Dead silence reigned—neither spoke a word; there was too much at stake.

Not a nerve of the doctor trembled, his hand was firm as steel, his lips never quivered, though the unspeakable anxiety of his feelings made his face white and stern.

It was done at last.

A low cry burst from the sufferer's lips. The doctor bent down over her.

"I see! I see! though dimly!" she cried, joyfully. "I see! Oh God, whom do I see? Is this an illusion? Is Gerard Middleton before me?"

He stood upright, where the light fell faintly in from a shaded window. There was a mighty struggle in his breast, and he was powerless to conquer it. His arms reached out after her.

"Come to me, Winifred, come to me. I must hold you to my heart, or it will burst!"

She sprang up: "Gerard." She buried her face in his bosom.

"Thank God!" was all he could utter.

He sat down, yet holding her to his breast, yet feeling her arms clasped about his neck, and her cheek laid against his. She thought not of her restored sight, nothing of poor, anxious Horace waiting without; all the world was swallowed up in the one idea—Gerard Middleton.

Many days of weakness and pain did Winifred pass in a darkened chamber, forbidden to look even upon that dear face which hovered continually over her. His presence soothed her like a strain of sweet music.

Perfect vision came to her never again. She could enjoy the pleasure of viewing near objects, and the companionship of books. For this incalculable favor she was very grateful.

When the light of day was admitted into her chamber, Dr. Middleton brought a white-haired man to the sofa where Winifred reclined; and, while Gerard supported the pale woman in his arms, the aged man of God united these two, so long severed in marriage.

Horace Vernon, his face hidden in the drapery of the window, was the only witness. When the clergyman had pronounced his blessing on the new-made husband and wife, and departed, Horace conquered his emotion, and came forth. He took a hand of each.

"May God bless you!" he said, earnestly. "God bless you forever! I am content."

It was not until Winifred had been many weeks a happy wife, and the pair were settled down to blissful their life at Atherton Hall, that she knew the truth and tenderness with which she had been loved through those long years of separation.

Gerard Middleton had wandered over Europe, studying his profession here and there; lonely and desolate in heart, but firm in his resolution to win for himself a name that all should speak with praise.

He had succeeded. His fame spread over the continent. Gold came to his coffers, and the gratitude of thousands of human beings to his heart. But peace of mind never came. His heart had an unfilled void.

At length he had read in an American paper of the duel and subsequent death of Milford Winthrop. Newly-awakened hope swelled his bosom, and he sailed for America immediately.

He had established himself in New York, and sent faithful agents all over New England to

obtain some clew to his beloved Winifred. Providence brought her to his door.

Dear reader, your good heart can imagine the happiness of those two persons who had loved each other so faithfully through years of doubt and despair; and perhaps you can also picture to yourself the desolation of Horace Vernon, when once more in the calm of his Southern home.

He never married, but through a long and virtuous life, the poor blessed his name, and men loved and respected him. And he found his greatest joy below, in the long visit, which he paid annually, to his friends at Atherton Hall.

John Rutherford and his wife, living as they did, within a day's ride of the Middletons, found much pleasure in their society; and Mr. Rutherford felt no jealousy, but only content when the older friendship between Mrs. Rutherford and Dr. Middleton was renewed.

And thus, in peace and happiness, we leave them.

THE END.

The Half-Dime Singer's Library.

- 1 WHOA, EMMA! and 59 other Songs.
- 2 CAPTAIN CUFF and 57 other Songs.
- 3 THE GAINSBORO' HAT and 62 other Songs.
- 4 JOHNNY MORGAN and 60 other Songs.
- 5 I'LL STRIKE YOU WITH A FEATHER and 62 other Songs.
- 6 GEORGE THE CHARMER and 56 other Songs.
- 7 THE BELLE OF ROCKAWAY and 52 other Songs.
- 8 YOUNG FELLAH, YOU'RE TOO FRESH and 60 other Songs.
- 9 SHY YOUNG GIRL and 65 other Songs.
- 10 I'M THE GOVERNOR'S ONLY SON and 58 other Songs.
- 11 MY FAN and 65 other Songs.
- 12 COMIN' THRO' THE RYE and 55 other Songs.
- 13 THE ROLLYING IRISHMAN and 59 other Songs.
- 14 OLD DOG TRAY and 62 other Songs.
- 15 WHOA, CHARLIE and 59 other Songs.
- 16 IN THIS WHEAT BY AND BY and 62 other Songs.
- 17 NANCY LEE and 58 other Songs.
- 18 I'M THE BOY THAT'S BOUND TO BLAZE and 57 other Songs.
- 19 THE TWO ORPHANS and 59 other Songs.
- 20 WHAT ARE THE WILD WAVES SAYING, SISTER? and 59 other Songs.
- 21 INDIGNANT POLLY WOG and 59 other Songs.
- 22 THE OLD ARM-CHAIR and 58 other Songs.
- 23 ON CONEY ISLAND BEACH and 58 other Songs.
- 24 OLD SIMON, THE HOT-CORN MAN and 60 others.
- 25 I'M IN LOVE and 56 other Songs.
- 26 PARADE OF THE GUARDS and 56 other Songs.
- 27 YO, HEAVE, HO! and 60 other Songs.
- 28 'Twill NEVER DO TO GIB IT UP So and 60 other Songs.
- 29 BLUE BONNETS OVER THE BORDER and 54 others.
- 30 THE MERRY LAUGHING MAN and 56 other Songs.
- 31 SWEET FORGET-ME-NOT and 55 other Songs.
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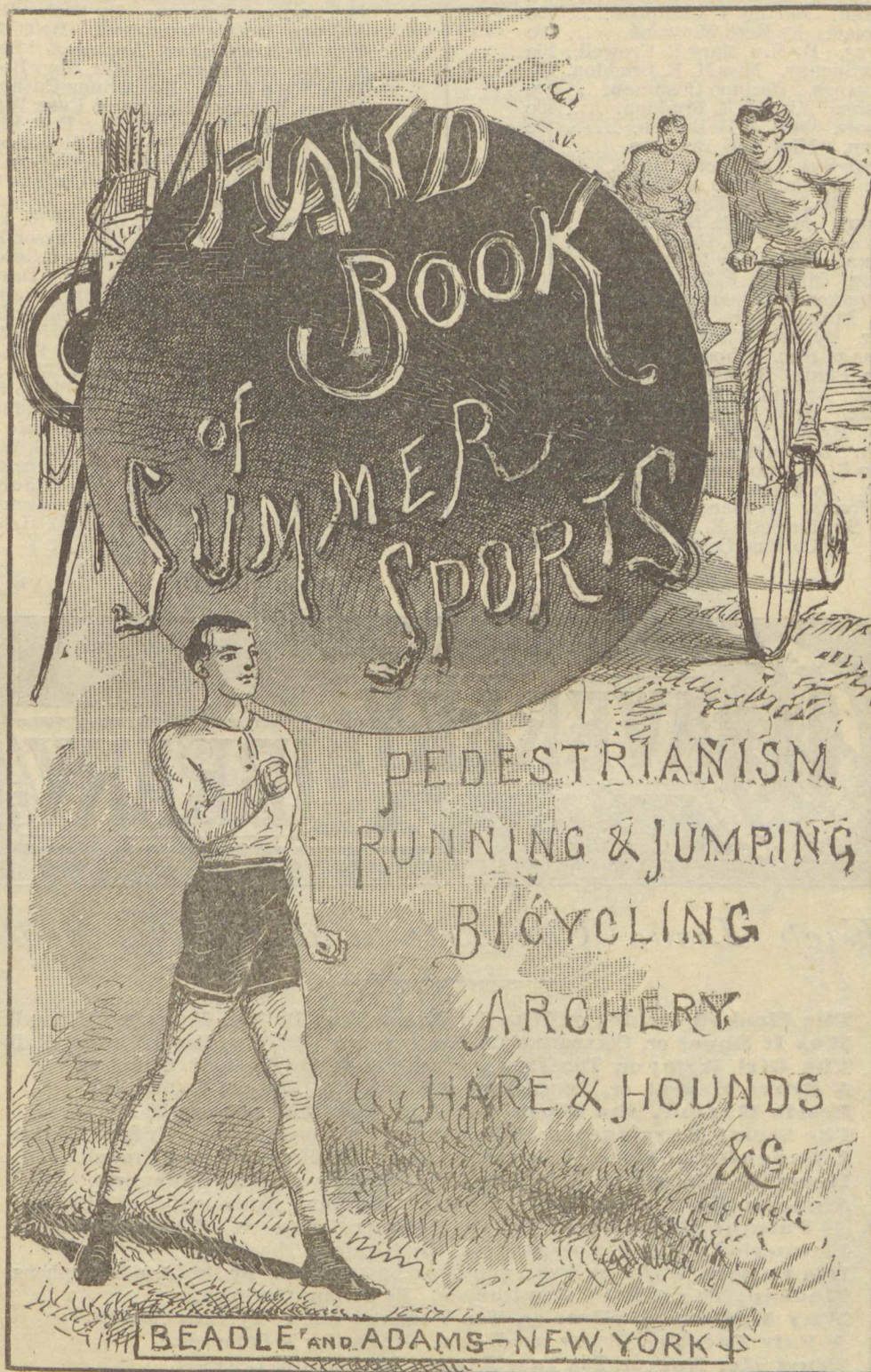
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